FIRST MAY ISSUE, 1919
VOL. XXI No. 3

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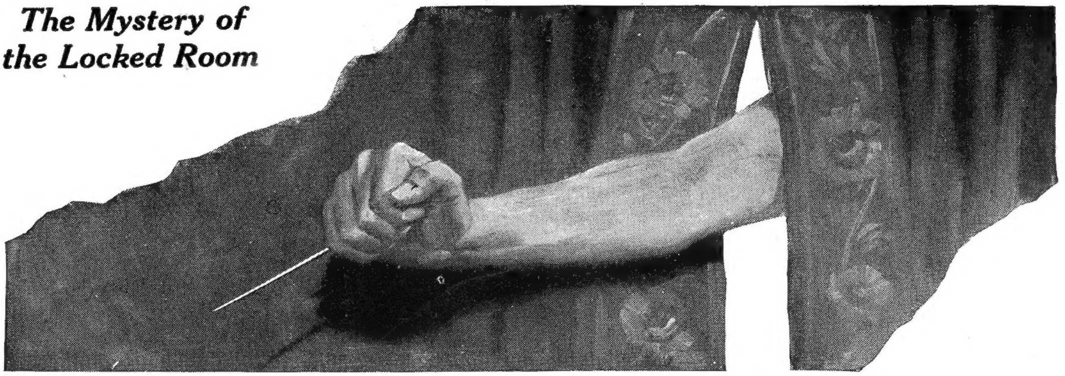

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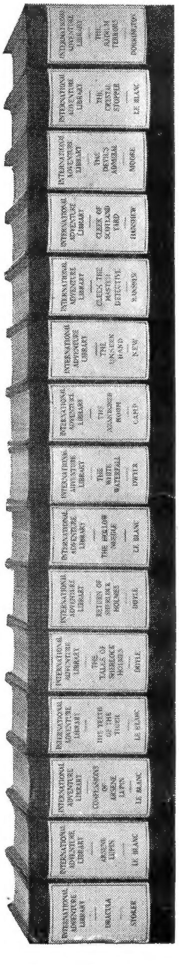

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The Secret of Being a Convincing Talker

How I Learned It in One Evening

By GEORGE RAYMOND

"HAVE you heard the news about Frank Jordan?"

This question quickly brought me to the little group which had gathered in the center of the office. Jordan and I had started with the Great Eastern Machinery Co., within a month of each other, four years ago. A year ago Jordan was taken into the accounting division and I was sent out as salesman. Neither of us was blessed with an unusual amount of brilliancy, but we "got by" in our new jobs well enough to hold them.

Imagine my amazement, then, when I heard:

"Jordan's just been made Treasurer of the Company!"

I could hardly believe my ears. But there was the "Notice to Employees" on the bulletin board, telling about Jordan's good fortune.

Now I knew that Jordan was a capable fellow, quiet and unassuming, but I never would have picked him for any such sudden rise. I knew, too, that the Treasurer of the Great Eastern had to be a big man, and I wondered how in the world Jordan landed the place.

The first chance I got I walked into Jordan's new office and after congratulating him warmly, I asked him to let me "in" on the details of how he jumped ahead so quickly. His story is so intensely interesting that I am going to repeat it as closely as I remember.

"I'll tell you just how it happened, George, because you may pick up a pointer or two that will help you.

"You remember how scared I used to be whenever I had to talk to the chief? You remember how you used to tell me that every time I opened my mouth I put my foot into it, meaning of course that every time I spoke I got into trouble? You remember when Ralph Sinton left to take charge of the Western office and I was asked to present him with the loving cup the boys gave him, how flustered I was and how I couldn't say a word because there were people around? You remember how confused I used to be every time I met new people? I couldn't say what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it; and I determined that if there was any possible chance to learn how to talk I was going to do it.

"The first thing I did was to buy a number of books on public speaking, but they seemed to be meant for those who wanted to become orators, whereas what I wanted to learn was not only how to speak in public but how to speak to individuals under various conditions in business and social life.

"A few weeks later, just as I was about to give up hope of ever learning how to talk interestingly, I read an announcement stating that Dr. Frederick Houk Law, of New York University had just completed a new course in business talking and public speaking entitled 'Mastery of Speech.' The course was offered on approval without money in advance, so since I had nothing whatever to lose by examining the lessons, I sent for them and in a few days they arrived. I glanced through the entire eight lessons, reading the headings and a few paragraphs here and there, and in about an hour the whole secret of effective speaking was opened to me.

"For example, I learned why I had always lacked confidence, why talking had always seemed something to be dreaded whereas it is really the simplest thing in the world to 'get up and talk.' I learned how to secure complete attention to what I was saying and how to make everything I said interesting, forceful and convincing. I learned the art of listening, the value of silence, and the power of brevity. Instead of being funny at the wrong time, I learned how and when to use humor with telling effect.

"But perhaps the most wonderful thing about the lessons were the actual examples of what things to say and when to say them to meet every condition. I found that there was a knack in making oral reports to my superiors. I found that there was a right way and a wrong way to present complaints, to give estimates, and to issue orders.

"I picked up some wonderful pointers about how to give my opinions, about how to answer complaints, about how to ask the bank for a loan, about how to ask for extensions. Another thing that struck me forcibly was that, instead of antagonizing people when I didn't agree with them, I learned how to bring them around to my way of thinking in the most pleasant sort of way. Then, of course, along with those lessons there were chapters on speaking before large audiences, how to find material for talking and speaking, how to talk to friends, how to talk to servants, and how to talk to children.

"Why, I got the secret the very first evening and it was only a short time before I was able to apply all of the principles and found that my words were beginning to have an almost magical effect upon everybody to whom I spoke. It seemed that I got things done instantly, where formerly, as you know, what I said 'went in one ear and out of the other.' I began to acquire an executive ability that surprised me. I smoothed out difficulties like a true diplomat. In my talks with the chief I spoke clearly, simply, convincingly. Then came my first promotion since I entered the accounting department. I was given the job of answering complaints, and I made good. From that I was given the job of making collections. When Mr. Buckley joined the Officers' Training Camp, I was made Treasurer. Between you and me, George, my salary is now $7,500 a year and I expect it will be more from the first of the year.

"And I want to tell you sincerely, that I attribute my success solely to the fact that I learned how to talk to people."

******

When Jordan finished, I asked him for the address of the publishers of Dr. Law's Course and he gave it to me. I sent for it and found it to be exactly as he had stated. After studying the eight simple lessons I began to sell to people who had previously refused to listen to me at all. After four months of record breaking sales during the dullest season of the year, I received a wire from the chief asking me to return to the home office. We had quite a long talk in which I explained how I was able to break sales records—and I was appointed Sales Manager at almost twice my former salary. I know that there was nothing in me that had changed except that I had acquired the ability to talk where formerly I simply used "words without reason." I can never thank Jordan enough for telling me about Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking. Jordan and I are both spending all our spare time making public speeches on war subjects and Jordan is being talked about now as Mayor of our little Town.

So confident is the Independent Corporation, publishers of "Mastery of Speech," Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how you can, in one hour, learn the secret of speaking and how you can apply the principles of effective speech under all conditions, that they are willing to send you the Course on free examination.

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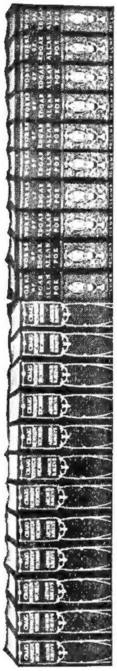

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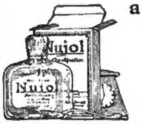

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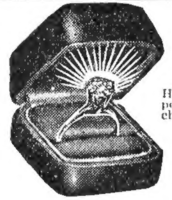

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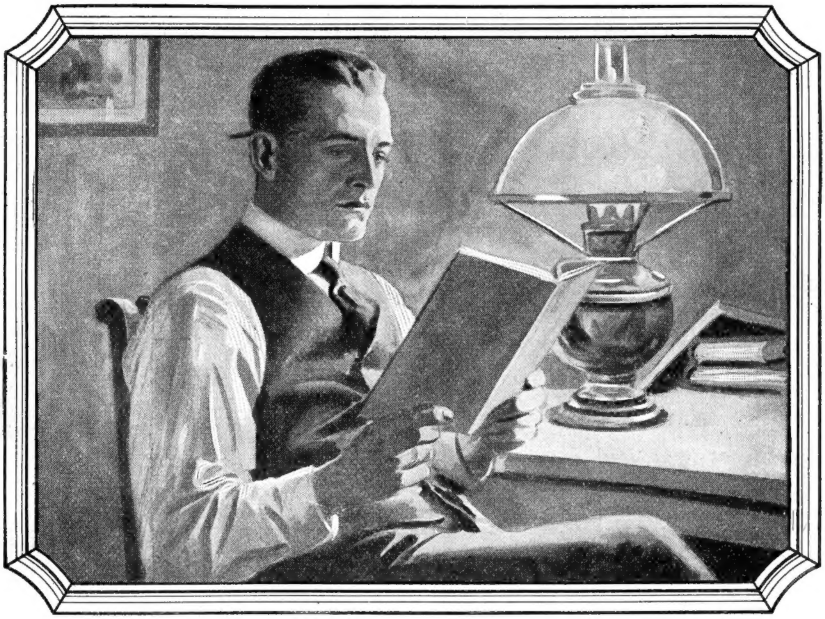

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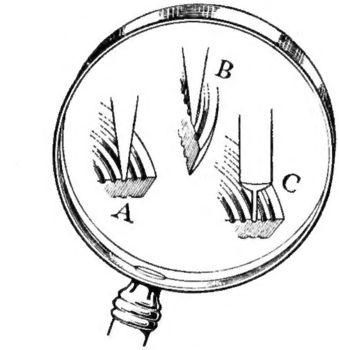

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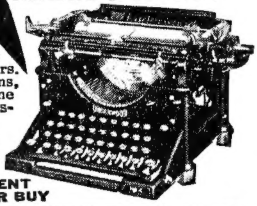

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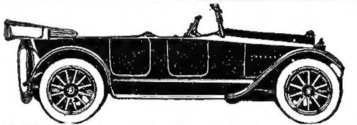

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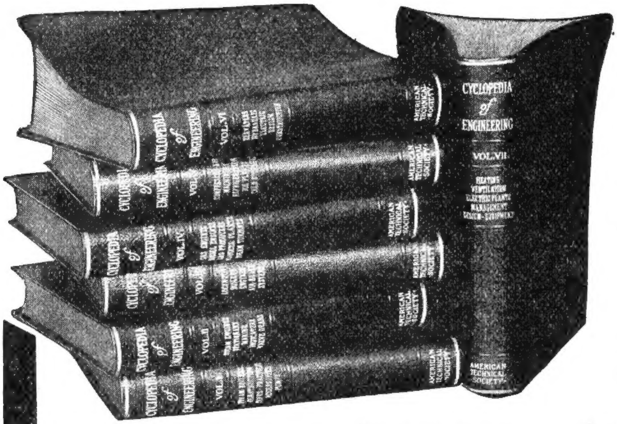

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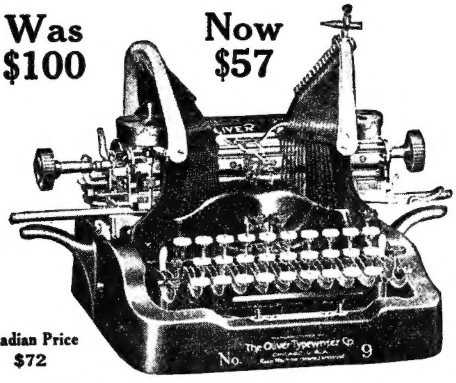

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Adventure
Vol 21-No 3
May 3rd 1919

Published Twice a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President — C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $3.00 in advance — **Single Copy, Twenty Cents**

Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 60 cents.

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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FROM BEHIND MASKS

A Two-Part Story—Part I

By GORDON YOUNG

The further adventures of *Everhard* and *Gaboreau.*

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MID-MAY ISSUE

Adventure
Registered in United States Patent Office
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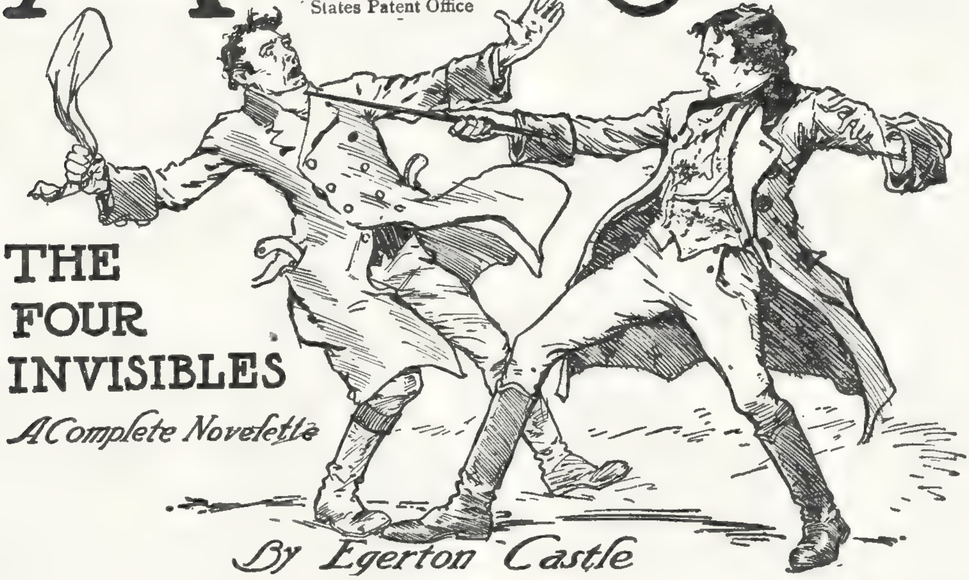
May 3rd
Issue
1919



THE FOUR INVISIBLES

A Complete Novelette

By Egerton Castle

CHAPTER I

THE END OF THE THREE CHOUGHS

AS THE brown dusk began to rise in the vale of Winterbourne Stanton, one Mr. Daniells—a person of some consequence in that retired nook of "Dorset Dear," no less an one indeed than butler to Sir Jasper Ferrars of Stanton Manor—was leaning against a stile, lost in disconsolate contemplation. With hands in his breeches pockets, smoking an elfin pipe, he contemplated the cold ruin of what but a week before had been that well-found, alluring halfway-house known on the road from Poole to Salisbury as the old Three Choughs.

The destruction was complete; the desertion of the spot absolute. The whilom cozy inn and its self-supplying dependencies were razed to the ground, mere heaps of charred stone and all but consumed timber. The blast of an Autumnal storm—and the equinoctial gales of that year, 1817, had been the fiercest in living man's memory—had seen to it that not a foot should be spared. The Three Choughs had been the only dwelling on the margin of the bare silent downs within a mile around—a place of pleasant, quietly moving life. But now the great stillness had crept down from the heights and held the spot in its own solemnity.

For many years Mr. Daniells, in his off time, had been a patron of that cheery house of call. Of late, indeed, his office at the manor having sunk into sinecure, he had become something like a standing institution much valued and respected in the snuggery. Now this solatium of a monotonous existence was snatched from him. But the long habit of a leisurely evening walk across corn-fields and meadows to the site of the kindly hostelry had not yet been shaken off. Every sundown since the catastrophe had seen Mr. Daniells at the stile, musing, Marius like, upon the ruins and ready to

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deplore the new melancholy of the vale with the passer-by.

That evening of October the third the road seemed more than usually deserted. The companionable Mr. Daniells had not had one opportunity for a word with any creature capable of the least interesting gossip, the thinnest discussion. The last cart, thoroughly apathetic, had rumbled past half an hour since. Over the furrowed stubble on this side of the road, across the bare down stretching yonder away, deep silence reigned, broken only now and again, indeed emphasized, by the melancholy cry of plover or gull, the parting croak of rooks winging off to their roost in the margin woods of Stanton.

The lonely man's pipe had burned down to its end. He straightened himself, reluctantly preparing to retrace his way home toward supper—and another dull evening. But he checked himself; a wayfarer had appeared at the southern bend of the road.

Mr. Daniells leaned back once more, awaiting the event. Had it not been for this impulse of indolent curiosity, more than one episode of a startling nature would never have occurred in parts quite singularly remote from Dorset, and the course of several lives, perfectly unknown to Sir Jasper's butler, would have flowed into strangely different channels.

As the newcomer approached, Mr. Daniells discerned that it was a young man, dressed—as an eye well-accustomed to note such matters promptly recognized—in clothes of well-fitting, gentlemanly cut, if perhaps somewhat outworn, and—what seemed certainly an eccentricity in one thus attired—carrying an obviously irksome portmanteau. The wayfarer's gait indicated weariness. Presently he stopped and cast puzzled looks right and left, as a man might who has lost his bearings. Then, catching sight of the ruined heap, he advanced with quickened step.

After gazing a while, lost in a muse, he slowly turned round and, apparently for the first time noticing the still figure by the stile, addressed it in a voice and manner of easy civility, which confirmed the major-domo's first impression of his social status.

"Can you tell me—surely I'm not mistaken? This was the old inn."

"Yes—the Three Choughs, sir," Mr. Daniells replied, with alacrity detaching himself from his resting position to cross over. "Burned down, a week tomorrow. A great loss to the countryside, sir," he added, touching his cap as if to bring to the stranger's notice the fact that he knew a gentleman, dust, travel-stain and personally carried portmanteau notwithstanding.

"I have no doubt of it," said the young man. "And a loss to me. I knew the place well. An excellent inn. A loss to me," he repeated, bringing back his gaze to the scene of destruction, "this evening of all times! I particularly wished to stay here tonight. The Salisbury coach dropped me at the crossway. This is cursed luck. I meant to sleep here tonight. And I am dog tired."

He wheeled round again, cast his portmanteau on the roadside and sat down on the step of the stile. Then, folding his hands over his tucked-up knees, he resumed for a spell his discontented frowning at the ruins.

"The nearest place, I believe," he said at last, "is Keyning, and that is ——"

"A good hour's walk and a bit more. It's — hem — bad luck, as you said, sir," affirmed Mr. Daniells sympathetically. "I see you know this part of the country. The Harvest Moon, at Keyning, is not a bad place. But it's not the Choughs. No, not by a long chalk, as they say. I, for one, have regretted the Choughs every evening these seven days, as much, if I may say so, as you do this evening, sir. The only spot, for one thing, where one had a chance of talking, easy-like, to some one after a lonely day. This is a lonely place, sir. And I——"

"Ah, well, thank you, my friend," the young man cut in, wearily getting up again and seizing his bag once more. He was in no mood for chatting, but still spoke pleasantly enough. "No use sitting here, cursing Fate. Good evening to you. It's getting late and I had best get along—unless," he stopped upon a new thought, "unless you could tell me of some decent cottage hereabouts, where they would give me a shake-down and a morsel of supper—for the price I would have paid at the Three Choughs."

* * *

"WHY, sir—" Mr. Daniells hesitated—"it comes to me—that is, if you cared to accept of it—I could supply you with the accommodation myself. Either free—and welcome, sir. Or," he hastened to add, "or, if you should prefer it, I say—on the same terms. The Choughs were never the house to fleece the traveler. And it's very lonesome at the hall," he went on, almost pleading. "Dreary, I call it. It's close by, too——"

"At the hall? Close by, did you say? Surely, you never mean Stanton?"

"Stanton, to be sure, sir. I see you know the country—Stanton Manor. Maybe you know Sir Jasper himself—knew him, I should say, for Heaven only knows what's become of Sir Jasper!"

There was a pause. And at last:

"By George!" said the traveler, and that was all.

For a while he remained, gazing absently at the other's face without seeing—he was looking beyond. At length, recovering himself:

"I really beg your pardon, my man," he said; "my thoughts were far away. Sir Jasper? Yes, I know of Sir Jasper. He is from home, say you? And whom am I speaking to, if you don't mind telling me?"

"I am the butler. Daniells is my name, sir. There is only me and my wife left at the hall. The other servants have been gone these months. But I'm in charge. I think, in a manner of speaking, I may use my discretion. And I wouldn't like to leave a gentleman—for I can see with half an eye when a gentleman is a gentleman, as the saying goes, stranded on our road. And the hall is empty—oh, empty it is, sir—and that lonesome! And it lies closer than any place—now the old Choughs is gone. And I make bold to say, if Sir Jasper were at home, he would approve of my bringing in a gentleman in such circumstances.

A smile hovered for a moment over the young man's lips.

"So you really think, Mr. Daniells, that if Sir Jasper were at home, he would welcome me at Stanton—in the circumstances? I must take your word for that. I would have thanked you for the offer, even if it had not saved me another hour's tramp with this infernal bag. As it is, I accept gratefully—on the condition, however, that we look upon the hall, for tonight, as mine inn by the roadside—you take my meaning? And on you as the cheery landlord of—what shall we call it? The Stanton Arms."

A grin of satisfaction illumined Mr. Daniells' face.

"That's right, sir," he said briskly. "The wife happens to have a good cut of mutton on the roasting jack today. '*Pièce de résistance*', as Sir Jasper called the joint. And trimmings, of course. You will be just in the nick, as the saying goes. Meanwhile, sir, allow me."

And herewith the butler took possession of the portmanteau.

"Three good miles it is, from the crossways," he remarked feelingly. "A good three miles to carry your own bag. It's only a quarter of an hour's walk, by the short-cut, to the hall. Over the stile, sir."

Hoisting the package on his shoulder, he stepped a pace aside and respectfully indidicated the way. The young man permitted the ministration with a nonchalance that raised him yet a point higher in the servant's estimation.

They took their road across the stubble fields, the traveler absorbed in thought, the butler, a pace or so behind, restrained, however regretfully, by long habits of deference from intruding upon the silence. But as they reached the crest of the hill and, at a turn round the copse, the hall came into view a furlong away—one of those wonderful graystone manor-houses which are like gems set in the greening casket of Old World Wessex—the young man gave a subdued exclamation.

He halted a moment, both hands resting on his stick, to gaze upon the scene. A frown was upon his brow, and yet there was a kind of tender smile trembling on his lips. The emotion that had forced out the cry was not one that Mr. Daniells could rightly interpret, but it gave the man a welcome opening for renewed speech.

"Beautiful from here, isn't it, sir? I have sometimes wondered myself why they did not make the entrance to the park this way. Beautiful, I call it. But the avenue up to the hall—there, you see it on the left—is fine, sir, very fine. People do say that Stanton is one of the most perfect manor-houses in all Dorset. I'm sure I think so myself. Pity, isn't it, when you have such a place, to stay so long away from it?"

"So long."

The young man spoke the words evenly. There was no inquiry in the tone; he seemed rather to be thinking aloud. But the talkative Mr. Daniells found in it sufficient encouragement, and, as they resumed their walk, he delivered himself of information which he considered must in itself be of interest to the guest of chance, whilst it might to some extent justify the irregular behavior of a servant offering the hospitality of his absent master's house to a stranger picked up on the roadside.

"Oh yes, long! Seems long to me, sir."

It was now the fourth month since Sir Jasper, who up to that time had been leading his usual life, interested in his land, in his sport; entertaining a good deal in a bachelor way—"a widower, you must know, sir"—both his own neighbors and friends from town, had returned from a short absence abroad, oddly changed in his manner.

"Anxious, restless-like, if you know what I mean, sir. One moment one would have thought he was furious; another, that he was afraid—the queerest change, sir, as I have often said to many who came to inquire when Sir Jasper would be back. For it was the very next morning after his return that he went off again. He had never gone to bed! I was kept awake half the night, listening to him moving about the house. And he rang for me two hours before the usual time. He looked poorly—dreadful poorly—wanted his shaving-water, his boots at once and something—anything—to eat in his room. He who was always so very particular about a good breakfast. Thoroughly upset, he was. The look, as the books say, of one haunted——"

"Haunted!" echoed the listener, and this time there was a ring in his voice.

The butler drew up level with him and, looking sideways at him, marked the sudden excitement in the face, the new color that had mounted to the forehead, and felt flattered at having at last, as he considered, evoked interest.

"Haunted?" repeated the traveler. "Haunted, did you say?" Then, as if catching himself up, "this is curious, Mr. Daniells—I caught your name right, didn't I? Interesting. Any reason that you could think of?"

* * *

"NO, SIR. As I said, Sir Jasper was unlike himself. No one had ever seen him nervous before. Angry, if you like—oh, angry enough—but never nervous. It was extraordinary. We all said so, in the servants' room, when he was gone. For, half an hour afterward, down he comes without a word to any one, but looking black and scared. I helped him on with his greatcoat—it was a cold morning—and I felt something hard in his side pockets. I knew it was his pistols. And he selected his strongest stick. His face had a mighty odd grin on it. Then he went out—still without a word.

"I could not make anything of it all. And I stood at the front door, watching him go down the avenue quickly. And then I saw—I never would have believed it if I had not seen it myself—I saw him—him such a sportsman—give a jump at the sound of a gunshot! Swerve right across the road, he did, as if he had been shot himself—and yet it was only the keeper at the rabbits. Then he cut through the meadow into the copse. And that, sir, is the last I have seen of Sir Jasper—four months agone."

"Very strange," was the comment of the listener.

The Autumnal twilight was fast deepening. The house, as they drew near, loomed almost black against the faint sheen of the sky. A single yellow speck, lamp or candle flame, piercing through one ground-floor window emphasized the gloom of the place.

"And have you not heard from your master since?" he resumed, after a spell.

"Oh, we did get a letter. But that was as strange—to use your own word, sir—as the rest, considering he had gone away on a sudden idea, as one might say, without an ounce of luggage—with just his stick and his pistols. It came the next day, merely a bit of a note, from Salisbury. It's kept in my cash-box, but I can tell every word of it, having puzzled over it often and often. And it's short enough.

" 'Daniells,' it says, 'I am kept away on business. I can not say when I shall return. When I am able to come back, I shall let you know in good time. Meanwhile you are in charge at Stanton. I know I can trust you to look after my interests.' That was all, except the signature. You may believe, sir, that I keep that letter carefully. My credentials, in a manner of speaking."

The young man had a faint smile. The speaker certainly allowed himself some latitude in his interpretation of responsibility. Well, Mr. Daniells was in better luck than he deserved; he might have lighted upon a less eligible guest for promiscuous entertainment. Through the darkness the servant could not mark the smile; he went on, as they now emerged from the side path upon the avenue:

"Yes, sir, that is all I know. And many a time I have had to tell the same to gentlemen neighbors who came to ask if we had any news. All I can say to them is that Sir Jasper is to let me hear in time when he means to come back. And 'twas all I could say to the servants who became out of hand and obstrolopous—if you'll excuse the word—there being nothing to do. And they began saying in their opinion Sir Jasper never would come back.

"Stanton, to be sure, was terrible dull, they said. And, besides, they said, it looked queer. And, one by one at first, then the rest all together—except Mr. Withall, the coachman—asked for their wages and took themselves off. Yes, dull enough it was, I must confess, sir. For Sir Jasper used to keep pleasant company. And I found it duller, as you may fancy, when it came to be left my lee-lone at the hall with Mrs. D., for she has not much talk in her, if you see what I mean.

"A good soul and capable, but her Bible and Fox's 'Martyrs' and her cupboards—that is mostly what she cares about. And Mr. Withall keeps to himself over the stables. The Choughs, that was a resource, in a manner of saying. And now that it's gone, you'll understand, sir, I spoke truth when I said it was dreary at Stanton."

They had arrived at the porch. Mr. Daniells dropped the bag and rang the bell.

"I have the doors always locked, you see, sir, as in duty bound. But she won't be long."

As they waited on the steps, the young man asked carelessly—

"But did you never write to any of your master's relatives for news of him?"

"Why, sir, as a matter of fact, I didn't know of any one to apply to. I did consult the vicar, and he advised me to communicate with Sir Jasper's lawyer."

"Ah," said the guest, in the darkness. "Of course. And—well?"

"I sent him a copy of my master's note. I told him about the servants and asked his advice. He sent me some money, for we were running short—I having paid the wages myself—and he told me to keep exact accounts and wait, since it was clear, he said, as how Sir Jasper had left me in charge. And that was all. It's all right, Mrs. D., my dear. It's me and a gentleman." This, in a louder tone, to some one who could dimly be seen peering out of a side window.

"So, sir," said Mr. Daniells, "if you will please step in, we shall see what we can do for your entertainment. A gentleman, Mrs. D., who has to spend the night here," he went on, addressing an old lady of wrinkled and somewhat severe countenance, who had opened the door and stood in the hall, a large flat silver candlestick in her hand.

She raised her eyebrows.

"For the night, Daniells?"

"For the night, my dear," her lord replied in a voice of placid command. "And that means a bed prepared—in the blue room, I think—and a fire. Then some supper on a corner of the dining-room table. You will understand, sir, that—fair is fair, as the saying goes—we can not at short notice have things done as if Sir Jasper were in residence. But it will be as good, I hope, as the Three Choughs. The poor Choughs," sighed Mr. Daniells. "Now then, Mrs. D., bustle along," he cried, peremptorily, as the housekeeper, with dismayed countenance, still stood hesitating. "The gentleman is tired and hungry. And, while that's being done, sir, there is a fire in my office, if you don't mind waiting there."

He stopped, listening. The front door was still wide open; through the night air came the sound of hoofs and wheels on the hard ground of the avenue.

"Why, bless my wig," he said in a lower tone, "if there isn't a carriage coming up!"

CHAPTER II

THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT

THE stranger and the majordomo stared at each other; the same idea had struck them both. Mr. Daniells, with dropping jaw, was scratching his cheek in perplexity. The irregular guest, however, seemed the more perturbed of the two; a heavy frown of annoyance darkened his face. The housekeeper was the first to speak.

"A carriage, at this hour—why this'll be the master at last!" she said and advanced to the door, just as the vehicle with a fine curve drew up by the porch. "Save us, no! Who, in the Lord's name can it be, Daniells?" she whispered, in awestruck amazement, looking over her shoulder at her husband and screening the light in her hand from a puff of wind.

The traveler alighted and, oddly painted on the darkness by a ray from the carriage lamp, stood giving directions to a servant in a foreign-looking livery, for the lifting down of sundry articles of luggage. He then turned round briskly and, with a clanking of spurs, came up the stone steps. At sight of him, the butler, who had pushed his way past his wife, gave an exclamation of surprized recognition—in which might have been detected a certain ring of relief.

"Ha, this is pleasant!" cried the newcomer in a voice of great heartiness. "This hospitable Stanton—the door wide open at the very sound of a traveler's wheels!" He spoke fluently, though with a perceptible outlandish accent. "I hope good Sir Jasper is well?"

"Sir Jasper—Captain?" said the major-domo, faltering. "Sir Jasper? Have you come on a visit, sir?"

"Yes, surely; he expects me, does he not?"

"Why, Captain Hanstedt, sir, Sir Jasper has been away since the end of May."

Blank dismay overspread the visitor's countenance.

"Away? *Der Teufel!*" he exclaimed. And when the servant had laid bare the state of present affairs at Stanton, "Most singular," he went on. "Singular, most singular! Inexplicable. I must say. It was all arranged when I was here last—you remember, in March last—that when I returned to England in the Autumn, my first visit was to be with him, for the shooting. I wrote two days ago, to announce my coming on the fourth. What has happened—nothing bad I hope?"

Daniells took the candle from his wife's hand and brought its light over a heap of unopened letters on the hall table. The visitor bent down to look and turned one over with the end of his switch.

"There's mine," he said and pondered. Then straightening himself, "What's to be done, now? It's the deuce of a long drive back to Salisbury."

Here the other traveler, who, during the colloquy, had remained in the shadow, came back into the circle of light and remarked quietly:

"Well, Mr. Daniells, it really seems decreed that you are to dispense the hospitality of Sir Jasper's house to stranded wayfarers tonight."

The miltary gentleman looked up quickly, first at the speaker, who answered the look by a slight, very easy bow, and then inquiringly at the butler.

"Ah, hum—yes," said the latter, betraying some confusion. "Rather funny, isn't it, Captain Hanstedt, sir? This gentleman, a friend of Sir Jasper—" and as he said this there was appeal in his side-flung glance—"this gentleman who—well, like yourself, sir, did not know—in fact, sir, he is going to spend the night here, too. I mean, like yourself, as we hope, sir, if you don't mind hasty accomodation. Yes sir, as I was saying, I am sure Sir Jasper would have wished it. Please to step this way, gentlemen. I'll send your carriage round to the stables, Captain. And the wife will see to the rooms."

The two strangers found themselves ushered into a morning room, the coldness of which was soon relieved by the lighting of a few candles and the crackling of a fire ready laid.

For a while there was a thoughtful silence. The captain stood before the hearth, legs apart in approved dragoon style. His companion sank into an armchair with equally self-possessed manner. And they took stock of each other.

They were much of an age; both in their middle twenties, perhaps twenty-eight; both men of good looks and of breeding, albeit in ways markedly contrasting. The captain's undress frogged coat and strapped trousers proclaimed the half-pay officer; his mustache heralded cavalry service. Brilliant, mobile, black eyes and white teeth which showed in flashes between very red smiling lips, gave a look of intense vital energy to a full-blooded countenance which otherwise was set in easy-going geniality, suggestive above all things of the hearty *bon-vivant.*

The other had the clear-cut, regular, rather impassive cast of features which belongs to the best type of English manhood—the gray eyes of the self-reliant, looking straight and direct, observant, without being searching; the set lips, firm, rather disdainful, the lips of one who thinks more than he talks, who at least had rather listen at any time than hear his own voice. It was the face of a man who is perhaps best satisfied with his surrounding when alone.

After a minute or two of mutual contemplation in a silence broken only by the crackling of the firewood, the military gentleman moved away from the hearth and, planting himself a pace in front of the armchair, clicking his spurred heels together in the true German style of ceremony, bowed.

"Sir," he began, "since our mutual friend, Sir Jasper, is so unfortunately absent, I introduce myself. Baron von Hanstedt, formerly captain in the Hanoverian hussars—the Death Hussars, Black Brunswickers, as you call them in England. Not your countryman, of course, but next door to it; we owe allegiance to the same king. Since the close of the late campaign an independent person traveling for my pleasure."

This was spoken roundly, and, though it had begun formally enough, it ended with an ingratiating look which obviously requested a similar confidence. The Englishman rose and returned the bow, if somewhat less elaborately.

"DELIGHTED, I am sure," he made answer with a pleasant smile that altered his whole countenance; the odd foreign mixture of geniality and ceremoniousness in this chance acquaintance had taken his fancy. "And I, sir—" but here there was a second's hesitation—"my name is Alfred Fendall. Like yourself, as it seems, a traveler, but a traveling student; yes—that can be taken as a description of my pursuits in life. Just returned from what some people would call the grand tour—if it had not been prolonged for so many years and gone through without the wearisomeness of the usual bear-leader. I have had a very tiring day," he added half-apologetically, sinking down again into his armchair.

The other eyed him a moment with his broad smile; then, drawing a chair to the hearth, he stretched out his legs to the blaze.

"Now, this is pleasant! Very pleasant. There is no one whose company, I think, is so enjoyable as that of a traveled Englishman. I am in luck. For, in this curious accident, I was like to spend a rather tiresome evening—either to return to Salisbury behind a pair of tired horses, or to remain *solus* and bored in a deserted house. I am grateful to fate—or I should rather say, if you will allow me, grateful to you, Mr.—Mr.?"

"Fendall."

"Ah yes, Mr. Fendall. Instead, I say, of solitude, which I hate. A meeting of friends. For do not the French have it, *les amis de nos amis sont nos amis?* And when I find myself, so to speak, your guest. It was your amiable suggestion to the butler. A friend of my old friend, Sir Jasper—why, a relative perhaps?"

The captain turned his head to look, with an engaging curiosity, at his companion.

"Yes—you are right. I may call myself a kind of relative. But I must decline any claim to the honor of being host at Stanton Manor. We are both guests here tonight. A quaint situation—guests of Mr. Daniells, the butler."

There was something in the tone with which this was said, courteous though it was, that discouraged further inquiry. The other, as a man of the world, forthwith accepted the hint.

"Quaint, as you say, my dear Mr. Fendall. A picturesque adventure: the soldier, the student, the deserted mansion—quite in the manner of our Musaeus. You know his work, no doubt. And it would be altogether delightful, were it not, in its way, alarming. What can be the mystery of Sir Jasper's absence, for mystery there seems to be? Have you any idea—do you know anything?"

"Nothing beyond what you heard yourself just now. Indeed, you would seem to have been more intimate with him, these last years at least, than I."

"Intimate? Well hardly that. He has shown me kindness; given me charming hospitality. Our actual acquaintance is not of long date. I must tell you that my father and he had been great friends in their young days, though I was unaware of the fact. When Sir Jasper met me in the hunting field last season and heard my name, he with the greatest hospitality invited me to make Stanton my quarters during the rest of the season—for old times' sake, as you say here. And, I must declare, a better host I never knew. It is quite impossible that he could have forgotten our arrangements for the Autumn."

The young man in the armchair remained silent, gazing pensively at the ceiling.

"I really think," resumed the ex-Brunswicker, after a musing pause, "that something ought to be done to find out what has happened to our friend—that good Sir Jasper!" He got up rather excitedly. "I wish—but I am myself hardly in a position to—but you, now, a relative; would you not think of making inquiries?"

"I certainly intend to do so," came the quiet answer. "In the ordinary course of things I should scarcely feel entitled to meddle in Sir Jasper's affairs. But these strange circumstances seem to justify inquiries at least. I shall go on to London tomorrow."

"Yes, that's right. His bankers, his man of affairs, any one you can think of—his doctor, perhaps, if you can find him. Of course, I would gladly devote some of my time to help. But—a stranger, a foreigner—they would send me about my business. Do you know, Mr. Fendall, it relieves my mind greatly, this decision of yours? I am sure you will not mind letting me know of anything you may find out. I shall leave you my address in town.

"Well, I am relieved! Yes, I feel I can do better justice, now, to whatever cheer the butler may have to place before us in the name of his missing master. He has been giving himself considerable exercise on our behalf, judging by the echoes which resound from every quarter of this empty house, up-stairs and down-stairs— Yoicks! Here he comes!"

The speaker's joviality was here in strong contrast with the air of gravity with which he had referred to Sir Jasper.

When Mr. Daniells, rather red in the face, threw open the door with professional pomp and announced that supper was on the table, the soldier affectionately linked his arm to that of the student and marched with him into the dining-room, remarking in his rich guttural tones:

"So, my dear Mr. Fendall, *procul atra cura*, as we used to sing at Göttingen, my alma mater. For the nonce let us dismiss dull care. No use in anticipating tragedy—which after all may be but our fancy—is there? 'Pon honor, here is a recomforting sight at the end of a long day!"

Indeed Mr. Daniells had performed wonders. It was no mere corner of the table laid out for a snack; silver gleamed on the mahogany under the light of candelabra. The promised joint, flanked by the "trimmings," cunningly dished so as to pass muster in the eyes of good-will as separate courses, supported by such cold viands as a ruthless ransacking of Mrs. D.'s larder could produce—the knuckle end of a gammon, a Blue Vinney cheese and so forth—now covered the board with more than sufficiency. The tankards were filled from the servants' hall cask of home-brewed; but topaz of sherry and ruby of port, glinting on the dresser, promised a congruous conclusion to a repast for the quality.

The Hanoverian took in the scene with a glance of appreciation. Having suggested by a courteous gesture that his new friend should undertake the carving, he himself, on the latter's equally courteous refusal, took up the honor of the table and went right willingly through the task. And he proved a notable trencherman; his voracious performance, after the manner of so many of his countrymen, interfered in no wise with the flow of conversation.

A BRILLIANT *raconteur*, he entertained his rather silent fellow guest —not to speak of the majordomo, for whom here was an even more welcome change in the dullness of times than he had hoped—with anecdotes of camp and court worthy of the fluent Gronow himself. Tales of student life—the high deeds of *Kneipe* and *Mensur*, the potting and dueling of the Göttingen good days, the brief, glorious career of the seven hundred noble Brunswickers, volunteers all, raised in mourning memory of the dead Duke William Augustus, the death of the leader in the Waterloo campaign—sundry personal feats and escapes of his own, relieved now and again by piquant allusions to adventures of galanterie during the late occupation of Paris by the allies—poured out from a seemingly inexhaustible fount.

"But come, my dear Fendall," he said at last, "what ails you? I can not help perceiving that you are not quite *une bonne fourchette* as one might expect to find a man with such square shoulders. You shame my appetite—and my garrulity. Not one personal confidence of your own adventures! What ails you? You young Englishmen, traveled as you may be, are an oddly buttoned-up generation. Sir Jasper now, I'll warrant, would have capped every one of my tales with some thrilling experience of his own young days—aye, and, *pardi*, of his later ones! Sir Jasper was good at a story, was he not, Daniells? Your name is Daniells, if I remember right?"

The butler paused in the act of removing the cloth, preparatory to placing the wine and walnuts on the mahogany.

"I do hope, Captain Hanstedt, sir," said he, as if brought back in the midst of his satisfaction to a sense of his present uncertainty, "that when you say 'was', it does not mean that you believe—it sounds dreadful, in a manner of speaking!"

"Nay, nay, my good Daniells, by 'was good' I only mean when we last met here. I have no doubt he is still as good and will be so when he does return. We have to thank you for a remarkably creditable feast, and I hope I may sometime or other have an opportunity to tell him how capitally you have acted in his name. And, while we drink his wine, the next best thing to hearing him talk would be to hear about him. It may help us on our quest. For this gentleman, like me, means to institute inquiries about the mysterious disappearance—inquiries which, I must say, might well have begun sooner.

"But *nunc est bibendum*, Fendall; in other words, fill and pass the bottle! And I further propose this," went on the baron, growing perceptibly excited, "in which I am sure you will concur; namely, that Daniells here, being vice-host tonight, take a seat and have his wine with us. Informal, but picturesque and pleasant! And this evening's rencounter is nothing if not picturesque; don't you think so?"

The young Englishman, who had first received this suggestion with something of a patrician frown, checked himself and said, with a transient smile:

"No, Baron, not vice-host as you, an invited guest of Sir Jasper may call him, but to me host entire. Landlord, in fact; Mr. Daniells will remember the bargain I made with him. I am here a guest at what we agreed to call the Stanton Arms. But none the less indebted to him for service much appreciated," he added, as confusion again showed itself on the butler's face. "So we'll drink with him a bottle or two of his no doubt remarkable port, for the good of the house. Bring your chair round, Mr. Landlord!"

The words, pronounced in half-jocular, half-serious, but wholly gracious, manner, put the retainer at his ease once more and loosened a tongue that only professional decorum had held in restraint. There can be no doubt that Mr. Daniells, the disconsolate contemplator of the roadside ruin a few hours before, spent an evening more agreeable to his gregarious tastes than he had ever known, even on the best days of the Three Choughs.

But, however cleverly lured on by the captain, nothing came out which could throw any fresh light on the mystery of the squire's disappearance. And, after an hour's conviviality to which he, however, contributed scarcely more than the cracking of nuts and the pushing of the decanters along the polished wood, the guest of the portmanteau pleaded fatigue to the guest of the chaise and requested mine host, as he insisted on calling him, to show him his room.

When he had been duly installed in his apartment, made cheery enough by a wood fire, the young man drew an armchair by the hearth and lost himself in deep reverie.

For a while he could hear talk renewed in the dining-room below him, where his companion was, no doubt, discussing a fresh bottle with Sir Jasper's hospitable butler. But in time profound stillness settled upon the house. Yet the young man dreamed on, wide-eyed, while the flaming logs passed into red embers and then into a mere heap of white ash.

At last he roused himself and wearily prepared to turn into bed. But, as he tossed his coat upon a chair, under the impulse of a new thought he took up the candelabrum, the candles of which were already burned well nigh to the socket, opened the door and sallied into the passage.

Noiselessly, but without stealth, with all the decision of one well-acquainted with the place, he made his way to another room in the opposite wing of the house; and there, raising the light aloft, he stood a while gazing wistfully at the surroundings. It was a boudoir, obviously that of the late lady of the house, but still apparently kept up as one of the reception rooms.

A harp, with disused, curling strings, glinted pale golden in a corner. The white-paneled walls were covered with watercolors and pastels. Over the mantelpiece, however, hung a picture to which, after a moment, the night intruder drew near. It was the portrait of a young woman, painted in the manner of Romney, with a sad, rather weak, piteously tender face, a child on her lap and another playing at her knee.

His candles still held aloft, he gazed darkly for a long while. Presently something—perhaps a faint noise, perhaps that unmistakable feeling in silence and solitude of another living presence near—made him turn round sharply. The light fell upon a black figure framed in the white doorway. It was the Hanoverian, who was looking in with a smile that revealed the white row of teeth under the dark mustache—with shining eyes of singular expression.

The Englishman could not repress a start of anger; both the broadness of the grin and the fire of the eyes were more than the situation justified. Nevertheless, it was in a subdued voice that he said—

"So, it is you, Baron."

"And so it is you, Mr. Fendall," returned the other, deliberately stepping forward. "I heard some one pass my door—my room is in this passage—at a time when I thought everything was asleep in the house. I myself, somehow, am wakeful as the devil tonight—wine has at times that effect, and I had a fine whack of it! But you, so tired and all that? Do you know, as I watched you first prowling round the room, then petrified before that lady's picture, I thought you were sleep-walking. All my care was not to startle you. Perhaps you were, after all. That was a mighty jump you gave! Charming picture that, of the late Lady Ferrars," he went on, drawing nearer and peering knowingly at the portrait.

The other made no response for a moment. At last he said with an effort at airiness:

"Baron, let's leave it at that. I mean, that I was sleep-walking, you awoke me out of my trance, and thereafter we both wisely sought our beds. I do not know what time it is, but I shall have to depart somewhat early in the morning and therefore——"

"Right, my dear sir. Quite right. Indeed you look rather overdone," said the Brunswicker, thickly. And, before the parting at his own door, he insisted with effusion upon shaking hands.

CHAPTER III

A LEAP IN THE DARK

"NOW, Landlord, I believe this will cover my shot. I'll not trouble you for a reckoning," said the young man, with a cheeriness perhaps a little forced, placing a guinea upon the table which Mr. Daniells was laying out for breakfast.

The majordomo pocketed the coin, smiling shamefacedly.

"Since you will have your little joke about landlords, sir. I am sure Sir Jasper——"

"Mr. Daniells, that will be a point to settle between you and Sir Jasper. It was your hospitality I enjoyed, not his. No doubt you can oblige me further—in the matter of a conveyance. Surely you can find something that will carry me and my bag as far as Blandford or Salisbury—any place where I can get coach for London."

"Salisbury?" The captain's voice rang hearty and guttural as he put in an appearance in the dining-room. "I am for Salisbury myself—London, too, for that matter, I hope—tonight. My dear sir, why not take your seat with me? Nay, nay, no ceremony! I have drawn blank at my old friend's; let me have in compensation a day in the company of my new one—if you will permit me so to call Mr. Fendall—of whom I have by no means seen as much as I would like. Yes? It must be yes. So—that is pleasant. Pray," turning to the majordomo, "warn the post boy and my servant to be round at ten with the chaise. That is settled," he went on, to bear down any remains of hesitation on the Englishman's part.

Thus it came to pass that, an hour later, the two guests of chance were bowling along the white road between the folds of the downs on their way to London together.

The last words of the captain to the majordomo, who, although generously tipped, bowed them disconsolately enough out of Stanton Manor, had been exuberantly optimistic:

"Tell Sir Jasper when he does return, as I trust he will soon, that I shall be in London till the fifteenth and that I hope to hear from him before that. I shall be at Long's Hotel, Bond Street."

Not content, however, with verbal instructions, he had with Teutonic thoroughness taken the precaution to hand the servant a slip of paper with the address and the date clearly written.

Then he had settled himself down with great show of comfort in his seat and selected a cigar from his traveling-case.

"Well, my dear Mr. Fendall," he began, between two puffs, "we are——"

"One moment, Baron," interrupted the young man. "Now that we are free of that excellent but rather foolish fellow's presence and that I am, as it seems, to pursue the pleasure of your acquaintance, it is necessary that I should clear myself at once of the discourtesy of sailing in your company under assumed colors."

The Hanoverian paused in his puffing, the tinder-box still poised in the air, and shot at his companion a smiling, inquisitive glance.

"My name is not Fendall, but Ferrars. The house in which we have spent the night is that of my father."

"So? Most interesting. Gad, this is indeed charming! Quite picturesque. Romantic—in the style of our Kotzebue's dramas. The wandering heir returning to the deserted ancestral mansion. Do you know, my dear sir, I had something of a vague idea, last night—some glimmering—as I saw you so pensive at the supper-table, gazing with a kind of melancholy abstraction at the old family pictures whilst I was rattling with my yarns. Yes, and again in front of that delicious portrait—but pray, pray go on," he urged, as the other made a deprecating gesture.

"I have a rooted dislike to talking of myself and my own affairs," the Englishman resumed gravely. "You will, I am sure, forgive me if I only say just as much as will explain my presence in a house which I thought I would never enter again. And you will, I hope, excuse the deception to which I deemed it advisable to have recourse. You knew, possibly, that Sir Jasper had a son."

"I knew there was a son somewhere in the world. Yes. And I knew there was an estrangement, for, on making inquiries as to the heir of my friend's beautiful estate such as civility demanded, Sir Jasper gave me to understand it was a subject which he declined to enter upon. I gathered, however, that he knew absolutely nothing of your whereabouts and did not wish to know."

"Estrangement!" murmured Mr. Ferrars with bitterness. "I will not enter into details; it was one of those horrible tragedies that are only known to the son who has had to protect his mother against the cold cruelty of his father. She died of it at last—that sweet creature you found me gazing at. But enough of that. When she died, there rose between my father and me one of those quarrels which might easily end in murder.

"It did not so end, thank God! But it ended in my leaving the home of my people for ever—aye, and even the land of my birth, until yesterday—disinherited, of course, to the last shilling. All this is common knowledge in the county, and I have no scruple in speaking of it."

"Yes," said the Brunswicker with deep sympathy. "And, I may tell you now, I had heard as much."

"Then the subject is closed. Now, as to my return and my presence at Stanton under an assumed name. A letter reached me in France some days ago from the attorney who looks after my affairs over here—I mean the little money settled upon me from my mother's side, a modest pittance enough, on which, however, I am able to live—a letter telling me of the incomprehensible disappearance of my father.

"Stay—I may as well show it to you, though it throws little light upon the matter, because, oddly enough, there is in it a reference, perfectly mysterious to me, to that date which you mentioned just now to Daniells as that of your own departure. Here it is," he added, pulling out a paper from his pocketbook.

THE captain laid down his cigar, unfolded the sheet and read out under his voice:

Wapshot & Jones
Gray's Inn Square
Sept. 22nd, 1817.

Dear Mr. Ferrars—

We hope this may reach you without undue delay, wherever you may be. We send it to the last address known. This morning we had a call from Mr. Johnstone, of Johnstone & Mesurier, your father's attorneys, to inquire whether we were in position to communicate immediately with you. He appeared to be in some anxiety concerning Sir Jasper, who has not been heard of for a considerable time.

We were not able, of course, to give him any information; nor do we surmise that you would be more likely, given the circumstances, to do so. Mr. Johnstone, then, though in an informal manner, suggested that we should be acting in your interest if we could induce you—though for what reason he was not at liberty to say—to make sure to be in London some time before the fifteenth of October; and, indeed, not to fail to call at our office early on the morning of that date, when, should your father's absence be prolonged, your own presence at Messrs. Johnstone & Mesurier's office would be a matter of vital importance to you.

We think that the suggestion concerning your attendance here on the day mentioned, even if it should not lead to anything definite, is of sufficient moment to merit all your serious attention. We shall be, in any case, pleased to consider the matter with you at any time.

We remain, etc., etc.

"Singular," murmured the captain, after the perusal. Then, looking steadily into his traveling companion's eyes. "And you have no idea of the business to be transacted on the fifteenth?"

"Not the remotest," answered Ferrars, taking back the letter. "But, so long as I am fully assured that I shall not be brought face to face with my father, I shall of course attend if called upon."

The other fell back into his seat and resumed his cigar, musingly.

"That letter," pursued Ferrars, "reached me three days ago in Normandy. I was near Cherbourg. On inquiring about any boat likely to sail for England, I heard of one bound for Poole. It gave me the idea of passing through Dorset on my way to London and finding out discreetly, for myself, what was known of my father's movements. I meant to take my quarters last night at a certain little inn near Stanton, where the people and I had been on a friendly footing in the old days.

"It turned out the inn was no longer there. The rest you heard: how that fellow Daniells, my father's present butler—the old one whom I remembered from a child left when my mother died—so whimsically offered me hospitality in what had been and ought still to be my own home. And now you will understand how, being discovered there in such irregular circumstances by a friend of Sir Jasper, I thought it wiser, both for Daniells' sake and for my own, to give the first name that suggested itself as fitting the initials on my portmanteau. No further apology is needed, I trust?" he added, marking, with a slight frown, the abstraction into which his companion seemed to have fallen.

"*Ah, non certes!*" cried the other, starting from his reverie. "Forgive my French—I am apt to think in different languages, though by rights it ought always to be in German. No, no; the whole thing, about this bizarre meeting of ours, is quite clear. Clear as crystal. My dear Mr. Ferrars, I am a friend of your father's—I know you will not expect me to pass any judgment on him. But I trust you will allow me the pleasure of shaking hands, knowingly now, with his son."

The ceremony being performed, with great cordiality on the foreigner's part and indulgent compliance on that of the Englishman, the subject of family affairs was by tacit accord dropped for the rest of the journey. Dinner at the Black Horse, Salisbury, a pint of Madeira at the Fleur-de-Lys, Winchester, a quart of old ale and biscuits at the White Hart, Bagshot, broke the ten hours of steady posting which brought them at last to town.

"Where, by the way, shall I deposit you?" had asked the captain, as a kind of conclusion to a prolonged spell of meditation, as they crossed Kingston Bridge. "I have my own quarters at Long's. But, unless you have bespoken a room there, I doubt——"

Mr. Ferrars had thought to detect a hint and answered:

"I used to patronize the Piazza Hotel, in Covent Garden. If you don't mind going a trifle out of your way."

"The Piazza, by all means, my dear sir." And leaning out of the chaise the baron had given the order to the post-boy.

When they parted under the ancient dimly-lit arcades of Inigo Jones, at the door of the hostelry so dear to the wit and fashion of the late century, now wearing into respectable decadence, the Brunswicker remarked at his most genial:

"Let me hope, my dear Mr. Ferrars, that we are *gens de revue*, as the French have it. I, myself, have much to do, and, as for you, tomorrow will doubtless prove a busy day. But you conceive my interest. May I not come and—say, smoke a cigar with you in the evening and hear what fortune you have met with in your inquiries?"

Mr. Ferrars pondered a moment.

"If you will partake of a quiet dinner with me, I shall be delighted. I have no great hopes, being, as you know, so trammeled. But we may consult. And, meanwhile, I remain greatly obliged to you."

AT SEVEN on the following day Baron von Hanstedt was ushered into the dining-room of the Piazza—a notable dandy, whose brilliant appearance and manner distinctly raised the modest visitor of the small valise in the manager's estimation.

"I will not conceal my anxiety," he said, from the moment of unfolding his napkin as they sat down in a remote corner of the somber dining-room. "Any news of Sir Jasper?"

"None that would appear to bring us nearer a solution of the mystery," said the son in a tone of some weariness. "The only satisfactory thing I was able to find out is that there is, after all, reason to believe that my father's prolonged absence is not necessarily the result of any fatal accident."

"Aha—so?" The baron paused, with his glass half-way to his lips. There was a glint of intense interest in his eye. He added promptly, "Well, that is at least a comfort. A great comfort. But the reason, the welcome reason——"

"I called at the bank. The manager, naturally enough, was disinclined to reveal anything concerning a customer's affairs. But, on my urging the anxiety I felt that there might be some sinister meaning to that total disappearance, he consented to reassure me by saying that the absence was presumably intentional. For it appears that in May last, the date mentioned by Daniells, Sir Jasper had hurriedly called at the bank and drawn a considerable sum. And this might well look, said the manager, as if he had contemplated a prolonged absence, a journey perhaps. And then, as I still felt doubtful, he advised me to dismiss all serious anxiety at least until the fifteenth."

"Ah, bah! The fifteenth again," murmured the Brunswicker, sipping his wine with half-closed eyes.

"For," went on the Englishman, "that was a date on which Sir Jasper's attendance at the bank would be a matter of importance. But, if he was not heard of by that time, there might indeed be cause for some alarm. Then, the manager said, advice might with propriety be sought from Bow Street. But he confidently trusted that would not be required."

"Bow Street? Gad, no, no; let us also trust there will be no need—and is that all?"

"That is all. For Mr. Wapshot, on whom I had called previously, had no more to tell than what was mentioned in his letter. Nor could I gather anything from Mr. Johnstone—my father's own lawyer—whom I thought it wiser also to visit. He seemed, it is true, rather concerned; but he pointed out, rightly enough, that, considering the peculiar relation in which I stood now with his client, he was not at liberty to discuss his affairs and movements with me. Nevertheless, when, after a very brief interview, I was taking my departure, he reminded me, though with some hesitation, of the advisability of my being within reach of summons on the morning of the fifteenth."

"The fifteenth," repeated von Hanstedt with an air of intense mystification. "A red-letter day, it would seem, in Sir Jasper's diary! Well, I see nothing for either you or me to do than to wait for that fifteenth."

"There is, of course, the alternative of applying at once to Bow Street. In fact I had almost made up my mind to go there in the morning."

The other looked up quickly with an air of grave concern.

"So? Well, you are the son. I am, at best, but a new friend. I would not take on myself to advise. But isn't there an old saw about thrusting fingers between the bark and the tree? The banker and this Mr. Johnstone, sound men of business, they both suggested waiting for a few days. I think—yes, I think their opinion is reassuring. Once set the Bow Street Red-breasts on the run and God knows where they may lead you!

"Perhaps face to face with a man full of ill-feeling against his son—a man furious, possibly, to find himself run down when his purpose, only known to himself, was to be left alone till a certain date. However, as I said, it is not for me to advise."

And with his man-of-the-world air, the air of one who knows the right moment to drop a topic, the baron led the talk into new channels. When he took his leave at a discreetly early hour, he remarked in a tone of affectionate interest:

"We shall, I fear, not meet again for some time. I am much engaged. But a note, should you have occasion, sent to Long's, will always reach me. Should you have any news, I need scarce say how interested I shall be."

This might be interpreted as a polite farewell. Mr. Ferrars, at any rate, when he returned to his table, after escorting his guest to the door under the arcades, and, toying with a final glass of wine, gave himself up to doubtful meditations upon his future course, came to the conclusion that he had seen the last of Baron von Hanstedt.

THE next morning, however, brought a prompt denial to that rash conclusion. After a night of uneasy wakefulness he was aroused from a late slumber by the entrance of a waiter:

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the man, "there is a gentleman here, who says he must see you at once. Most important he says. And though I told him——"

A lusty voice was heard from the passage.

"Never mind; I will explain. May I come in, Mr. Ferrars?" And, without waiting for the permission, the baron strode in with the well-known click of spurs. "The matter is one of such moment, I know you will forgive this rude intrusion."

He gave an imperious nod to the waiter, who, after leering curiously at the gentleman caught still abed, obediently departed—firmly convinced that here was a coming instance of pistols for two that day.

"The fact is, my dear sir," went on the visitor, "I have the most extraordinary news."

"For me?" said Ferrars, with no great display of interest.

In truth, in his still drowsy state what he chiefly felt was resentment. He sat up, bare legs dangling over the bedside, and perfunctorily indicated a chair. The baron, however, remained standing, his attitude manifesting an evident state of excitement.

"For you," he said, pulling out some papers from his breast pocket. "This disappearance of your father——"

"Ah, my father still."

"Yes—there is after all a mystery about it. But I think we are near solving it."

"We, Baron?"

"We, I said; but it will rather be you, or so I hope. And I am thankful I was able to find you in time, for the matter appears pressing. Very pressing. Now listen—or rather, read this first. It is from the butler at Stanton. I found it last night at my hotel."

The young man took an ill-scrawled sheet and read:

Captain Hansted, honored sir—

I forward a letter which arrived here almost as soon as you had left. As it is marked urgent, I took it at once to the post-office, and I trust it will reach your hand in good time. It was luck, in a respectful manner of speaking, that you thought of leaving your address. Your obedient servant,

W. Daniells.

He handed back the note and took another that was held out to him. It was penned in a slender foreign hand. And this is what he read, in French:

My good friend—

I want help badly and soon and you are the only one of whom I can think in my extremity. I am ill, very ill. I am detained in some place unknown to me—all I do know is that it is somewhere near Versailles—sequestered by people also unknown to me. What their purpose may be, I can only guess—and that is to prevent me being in London on the fifteenth, a day of much importance to me; if indeed they mean to let me out of this place alive.

But I, somehow, am in fear they mean to do me to death after all. A natural death it may seem, but it will be murder. Murder, if some one does not come to my help! I have, through God's mercy, found a secret friend in my nurse—for they pretend to nurse me. But she also is helpless and terrorized. She writes this for me; I am too weak, and almost blind. It is horrible. I bethought myself of you and remembered you might be found at Stanton.

Pray God this may reach you, and, for the love of heaven, come at once to Versailles! Show yourself near the north confessional in the Church of Saint Louis any day at first mass; she will know you. And, at any rate, you will know her by her blue linen dress and the gray veil over her head. She will tell you the house. Then you must act, as best you may devise, to get me out of this living tomb. Come at once, and may you find me still alive.

The letter was signed in another hand, larger and trembling. The young man looked up in blank dismay.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "this is my father's signature. And, after examining it again for a spell, "He was indeed in a weak state when he signed this. What is to be done? What will you do——"

"What would I do," said the baron excitedly, "if I were free—but I am not. Why, post to Paris at once, obtain police aid, meet the messenger, find out the house—and the rest *à la grâce de Dieu!* My poor old friend! But it is quite impossible for me to leave England just now. I have business of too great importance. I was in despair. Then I thought of you. You, his son, singularly met by Providential chance.

His son, for all your estrangement, you are here; you will—you must—act in my stead. You will have even more power than a stranger.

"There is no time to spare. Nay, listen to me—and let me urge you to dress, as quickly as you can. I shall, if you will allow me, even serve with a valet. Yes, I have thought the whole matter out. I called on my way here at the Golden Cross. The Dover coach had already left, but it can still be done by posting. I ascertained that the packet leaves harbor at six in the morning. Let me ring for your shaving-water. Yes, here is the bell. So. By posting, I say; I have ordered a chaise for eleven.

"With good luck you can be in Dover before midnight. Then for Calais—and without a stop to Paris. And my servant will see to everything for you; I have warned him, just as for myself—a clever fellow, a Frenchman and knows Paris. Within forty-eight hours you shall alight at the *Bureau de la Sûreté*, take chief of police's sanction—and act. Act without loss of an hour! Already a day has been wasted.

"As for expense—it will be a trifle to what I should lose by absenting myself—you will, of course, let me discharge that. You need not scruple; if, as I hope to God, we rescue Sir Jasper, he will repay the debt. Here are the traveling funds."

He produced a bundle of bank-notes which he slapped upon the table.

"Should you require more, you can write to me. You see I have thought of everything. You have your passports?"

While the Brunswicker rattled on sanguine, voluble, Ferrars—awake now with a vengeance—flung the letter on the table and sprang out of bed; he submitted to his friend's ministrations, in non-committal silence.

"My father, in truth, was in dire state when he wrote his name after that mysterious message. Something must be done. I have no doubt," he said, as he accepted the razor which the other had been stropping for him, "that Sir Jasper would rather remain indebted to you than to me for his rescue—if it is to prove a rescue. Did you not yourself advise me against intermeddling?"

"Nay, nay. This is an appeal, a piteous appeal. It must be answered. I am tied here, as I told you, and you are your own master. And, whatever has happened between you, in such a case as this, you, the son, can not refuse."

"I will go," said Ferrars quietly.

At which the baron gave a noisy sigh of relief.

The young man completed his toilet and packed his valise, listening without further comment to suggestions and advice about his journey. At last he took up the notes, counted them and consigned them, together with the letter, to his wallet.

"I will account for this on my return," he said simply. "Without it I could scarce have left this day."

"Ah, my dear fellow, never mind such details. The journey is for you a labor of duty. As for me, I can not tell you what a relief it is—a service for which, happen what may, I shall ever be grateful."

CHAPTER IV

THE FOREST OF MONTMORENCY

"DOUBT indulged," as one learned in life's philosophy has written, "soon becomes doubt realized." It was during the last stage but one on the weary, bone-shaking, paved *route royale* from Calais to Paris that lowering doubt first arose like a cloud on the fringe of Ferrars' meditation.

The mysterious nature of the errand upon which he had permitted himself to be jockeyed assumed suddenly a new color. It was an errand, whatever way he looked at it, the issue of which was bound to be painful. Whether he failed altogether and came too late to prevent the mischief, or he succeeded, only to be brought into renewed relations that were intolerable to him; whether his father proved grateful, and through gratitude inclined to reconciliation—or—which was quite as likely—sullen in suppressed resentment, the meeting could only bring renewed bitterness.

But now, from one moment to the other, a strange sense of distrust—as if it were the sudden coalescence of many vague, elusive suspicions — encompassed him like some kind of intangible net. The fifteenth—what was it that hinged on that date which loomed at all points of the compass in this tenebrous affair? All at once a conviction asserted itself that the transaction of that day, whatever it might be, was as well known to the plausible baron as to Johnstone the attorney—aye, as to Sir Jasper himself. Stay—from the advice he had received, it might be quite as important to Sir Jasper's son to be in London on that day. And yet he was flying on God knew what bootless chase.

"By George," thought Ferrars, "sent out of the way! But that letter?"

He pulled the sheet out of the wallet. Many a time, pondering over the incomprehensible affair which had hurled him upon his travels, had he conned it impatiently, in despair of ever fitting an acceptable explanation to it. But never before had it occurred to him to note that the address flap had been torn off the sheet. What proof was there—and at the thought he sat up rigidly in the jolting chaise—that it really came from France?

"You will, of course, show it to the *Chef de la Sûreté*," the baron had said, as he had closed the carriage door at the start of this hustled journey. Was that a blind? What proof that the letter really came from Sir Jasper? The handwriting of a long letter can scarce be forged—but a mere signature . . . .

He looked at it again by the waning light. Yes—it was Sir Jasper's characteristic way of signing. And the rather uncertain tracing of some letters might be accounted for by the feebleness of a sick man, his alleged impaired eyesight—unless both the message and the signature were alike a fraud. Why, how well might the whole affair be a fraud! A plot. A clever plot, boldly devised, to send out of the way some inconvenient witness. Witness of what? There was no clue to that. But he had literally been jockeyed out of England—hustled away with a plausible tale. Plausible?

Nay; a palpable cock-and-bull story, a manifest rigamarole, that ought not to have taken in the veriest tyro in life's arena! And Ferrars was no tyro. But he had been blinded by the appeal to filial sacrifice—and never allowed an hour to think, to weigh. Hustled—aye, and duly shepherded! That servant, too, provided so obligingly, so pat, by the unknown baron—that Jacques, that smiling, well-mannered Jacques, who had looked so attentively after his charge . . . .

Now, thinking of it from a new standpoint, Jacques' face and manner, his voice especially, were hardly convincing. But, if not a servant, what?

It came back to Ferrars' puzzled mind that at Beaumont, the last posting change they had left, Jacques had seemed to be on odd terms of acquaintance with one of the postilions in waiting. He had insisted upon this particular man undertaking the last stage. There might be nothing in that, and again there might be—what? The traveler leaned forward to have a look through the front port-hole of the chaise at the countenance of the driver.

But dusk had gathered. And in the shadow of the Montmorency Forest, which the road was then skirting, all that could be seen was the outline of the two men with heads drawn together, apparently engaged in close confabulation. Presently Jacques rose to his feet on the box and turned round, as if to survey the road in the rear.

There is no saying what trifling gesture or word in one already suspected may be sufficient to reveal a sinister purpose. Something in the nod which after a moment the man gave to his companion brought a conviction to Ferrars that mischief was afoot. Instinctively he groped for and seized his sword-stick, a weapon upon which in his continental travels he had learned to rely. And, indeed, almost on the instant the mischief he had so inexplicably anticipated was about him.

It came with such bewildering rapidity that it was only some considerable time later that he was able to connect in their proper sequence the things he saw, what befell him and what he himself did during the next few seconds.

THE chaise was suddenly pulled up. Amid shouts and curses from the two men outside the horses fell to frantic plunging and kicking. He was thrown off his seat. Before, in the confined space, he could straighten himself again, the door was torn open, and Jacques was dragging him out with fierce, unsparing hands and wild words of abjuration:

"Quick, sir! Quick—come away! The horses are mad. Not a second! He can not hold them another moment!"

Recovering his feet on the roadway, having been wrenched rather than helped out of the rocking chaise, the traveler could indeed, through the gloom, see the post-boy—who, like the other, had escaped from the box—straining, almost doubled up, at the long reins.

"He's out!" cried Jacques from behind.

On the words the other let go the reins and then did an unimaginable thing; he picked up the whip and furiously lashed at the horses, which, now released, leaped forward, almost overturning the carriage, still pursued into the darkness by the relentless flogging.

Ferrars, though dazed, turned round, impelled by a sense that the danger was now behind him—only just in time to avoid, by a swift instinctive jerk aside, the full force of a blow the nature of which he could not realize. It might have been the clawing of a panther but for its extraordinary weight—such a weight that, had it taken him on the forehead, it would infallibly have felled him to the ground.

As it was, it only tore his cheek and mercifully fell short of his shoulder. Something loose and dangling was in his assailant's hand. As it was savagely raised for a new crash, the young man, not inexpert in the arts of fight, sprang a pace sideways; out flashed the blade from the stick and swift, unerring even in the murk, whipped clean through the neck of Jacques the unknown.

The stricken man stopped short, his arm still uplifted; the weapon fell from his hand with an odd clatter on the ground. He swayed once or twice where he stood; then, with a fumbling motion, he drew from his side pocket something which bright silver mountings revealed as a pistol. But before, painfully striving, he could raise the flint, he swayed again. Rigid, like a falling post, dropped on his face and remained still.

The sound of the horses' gallop, the rattling of the chaise on the paving-stones, had ceased. For a few moments there was profound silence on the deserted road, broken only by the soughing of the wind amid the topmost branches. Ferrars stood motionless, his blade still poised against attack, striving to put some order in his ideas. He had killed a man, and that was a sickening sensation.

Presently came the sound of hurried footsteps, and it recalled him to a sense of peril still at hand. On an impulse he knelt by the figure on the ground, took up the pistol from the inert hand and cocked it. He had just succeeded in withdrawing another from the dead man's pocket when the footsteps stopped a few paces behind him. From the darkness, a voice—one of those horrible voices, husky dull and trailing, so peculiar to the French of the lowest class—called out, halting from want of breath, yet exultant:

"All in order, *mon Capitaine.* A number-one success, thunder! Horses in the ditch, carriage smashed to cinnamon, la la! And our Angliche stiffened to rights. I see. Ah! Bah, what is it? Aren't you pleased? A well-conditioned, first-class carriage accident, I call it. My job, though, was sacredly the more difficult."

The post-boy came a step nearer, bending down to peer.

"Got the pocketbook? Pity we must leave the flimsy. Well, well, the farce is played."

He gave a contented gurgle, which suddenly passed into a cry of surprize. The Englishman had risen to his feet and thrust the muzzle of his pistol into the ruffian's throat.

"Farce, brigand? I'll have it out with you at least! What is the game? Come, speak out if you have no taste for lead!"

But the other, with an exclamation of furious disappointment—"*Raté! Coup raté, nom de Dieu!*"—lashed out a kick which all but broke his captor's leg, wrenched himself free and bolted into the darkness of the wood. Raging, Ferrars sent a ball after him. A yell of angry pain told that luck had guided the flying shot. But that the scoundrel had only been winged was made clear by the sound, continued for a while, of his retreat through the crackling dead wood.

The young man passed his hand over his face; it was streaming with blood. He tried to take a step, but his injured knee gave way under him. As he crawled upon the ground, seeking some place against which he might rest, he passed the body of his unknown enemy, and the something white and limp that had dealt him so fearsome a blow caught his eye. He picked it up: a napkin, tied into a bag, filled with broken sharp-edged flints.

And now he understood. Death from such a tool or death from a fall upon the jagged stones of the causeway—the wounds would be the same. To minds unsuspicious—and why should there be suspicion—here had been nought but a fatal leap from a runaway carriage. Valet and postillion, thrown and shaken, but mercifully preserved. He saw it all with mind now singularly lucid.

"A well-conditioned accident," and—but for God's mercy, "a number-one success!" No murder, no robbery: "pity we must leave the flimsy." But then, why seek for the pocketbook? Ah, of course! The decoy letter. Englishman traveling for private purposes, killed in an accident. The decoy letter abstracted, but passport and other identifying pieces left. Walter Ferrars safely out of the way.

Nevertheless the mystery remained as closely veiled as ever. And it mingled now with that of Sir Jasper's disappearance, with that of the fantastic meeting at Stanton. Why was he to be put out of the way?

FOR a long while, propped against a milestone by the roadside, his pistol at hand—against the quite conceivable event of an attempt to make good the *coup raté,* the botched job—he grappled with the riddle. His brain was quite clear, though his hurts ached cruelly. But he could find no solution; he could come to no fresh surmise, save the horrifying one that Sir Jasper might well have already met with some similar fate to that so cleverly devised for the elimination of his son. And now, there were his own present affairs to consider. He had killed a man, and, whatever the issue might prove, there was no doubt immediate trouble ahead.

The highroads of France, busy enough by day, are at night strangely deserted. Of foot-passengers there were none; the purlieus of the forest of Montmorency had no good reputation for security. And of vehicles, an hour passed before the first made its appearance: a *roulier's* wagon. Unable to rise, Ferrars called out. But the *roulier*, after the custom of his tribe, was fast asleep; the horses, sagacious beasts, kept to the right side from long habit. The heavy machine rumbled by, unheeding.

The next to pass, half an hour later, was a fast-trotting *carriole*, which, on being hailed, simply hurried along at a faster rate, suggestive of fright. A few minutes later, however, it could be heard coming back.

"Was that your carriage, capsized over there by the bridge?" the driver sang out, pulling up.

"Yes. Are you the man I hailed?"

"Ah—I thought it might be a night-bird's trick. They pretend to be hurt, and, when one comes near—a bludgeon on the head, like as not! One knows a thing or two in Montmorency. But that carriage—it's different. What can one do for you? A lift?"

Ferrars had settled on his course.

"No—thank you. I must keep watch here on a dead man."

"Dead man? *Cristi!*"

"What you can do for me, is to fetch the gendarmes. A *louis d'or* for you, if you come back with them and with your *carriole* to take the body and me, for I can't walk. Here, my friend, six francs of earnest money."

The heavy coin rang on the pavement. The man jumped down, groped for a moment and, having found the faintly gleaming six-piece:

"At your service, milor. I say that, you know, because you speak like an Englishman. Shall I tell them——"

"Tell them," interrupted Ferrars with impatience, "that an Englishman has killed a man and waits for them to come. That's all."

"*Cristi!*" said the peasant again, mounted and hurried away.

Another hour elapsed, in the silent solitary vigil; in the blackness of

> the forest huge
> Incult, robust and tall, by nature's hand
> Planted of old,

before the *carriole* returned, escorted by two mounted gendarmes.

"It's here," shouted Ferrars from his milestone.

One of the gendarmes dismounted, heavy-booted, rattling with spurs and saber; he took up a lantern from the carriage and threw its light upon the blood-smeared face.

"That is the man—over there," said Ferrars calmly. "These are his own pistols. The sword-stick is mine. My other belongings are in the carriage. Now, if you will be so good as to help me into the cart, I shall be glad to be brought to the authorities."

CHAPTER V

THE SPANISH LADY AND THE BIBLIOPHILE

"WHATEVER poet or sage may say, old age is still old age."

Such was the unexpectedly rueful conclusion of one who was both poet and sage himself, who had, indeed, many a winning thing to say upon the placid beauties of life's Autumn.

In the estimation of that genial bibliophile, M. Havart de Gournay however, Autumn was no symbol for "old age." Winter, yes, of course; but Autumn, ah no. Autumn was only the hour of maturity, of fruition. For the serene, epicurean philosopher, in the words of one of his favorite authors—

> Autumn, nodding o'er the yellow plains
> Comes jovial on!

The Winter solstice in man—in a man of health and honored ease—might be said to occur at the passing of three score years and ten—perhaps. Now, M. Havart de Gournay, upon this eighth day of October, 1817, had only entered upon the sixty-first year of a life which, for all it had seen momentous upheavals, strange vicissitudes in his country's fortunes, had been evenly prosperous. Indeed, but for the looming of the Winter toward which Autumn undeniably drifts, this amiable gentleman could argue that the seventh decade was in many ways the most satisfactory of the whole span noted of the psalmist.

Unalloyed enjoyment is so rare in this world that it may without rashness be asserted that no one was more content with life than M. de Gournay as he sat by his balconied window, all in the glow of a fine sunset, examining a new bibliographic treasure just come into his possession.

His was one of those admirable houses, dating from the *Grand Siècle*, on the Quai Malaquais, overlooking across the silvery Seine the noble prospect of Louvre and Tuileries. Behind it, stretching as far as the Rue de Bourbon, spread the old mulberry-tree gardens of the whilom Théatins convent. The mansion, not inconveniently vast, but of perfect appointment, was ruled by a dame in her still handsome forties, reasonably plump, serene-tempered, withal witty—rare and delighting combination—who still thought the world of her old husband. She kept him in health and cheeriness with the help of an admirable chef and rejoiced in his bookish hobby, which left her free to enjoy the social intercourse for which he had but little taste.

The passion which had outlived all others in M. de Gournay's life was wholly bibliomaniac. And his collection of rare bindings—of volumes, incunabula and others, with fine printers' devices of *livres à vignettes* and armorial stamps—was a thing which no doubt when it came to the hammer—ultimate fate of all collections: *Nunc mihi, mox aliis*—would make the hearts of future bibliophiles leap with eagerness.

"Tell me whom thou consortest with; I will tell thee who thou art." To say that his best appreciated correspondent was Thomas Frognall Dibden, Esq., a friend of exile days in England, then engaged upon the "Bibliographical Decameron;" to say that one of the most welcome presences at his dinner-table was that of M. Brillat-Savarin, the witty gourmet then meditating his immortal work on "*La Physiologie du Gout;*" that perhaps would be the quickest way of limning the mental man in M. de Gournay.

The bodily presentment was equally engaging. Short, fresh and neat; always attired point-device in an old-fashioned style—slightly powdered hair in a queue; silver shoe-buckles and so forth, in men of his age quite *de mise* under the returned Bourbons; with a good appetite, sound teeth and clear eyes, M. de Gournay was the very image of one equipped for the enjoyment of life, especially in its Autumn. When M. Brillat-Savarin rallied him on the coming of an appreciable rotundity, he would answer, with a kind of smiling ruefulness that had nothing bitter in it:

"Bah, my good friend, let that be! Shall we not all of us be thin enough—some day?"

And he would add a "*dum vivimus, vivamus;*" a "*carpe diem,*" or some such comforting tag dear to the *bon-vivant.*

If it be further mentioned that the heir to this fortunate house, a youth of attainments, idolized by his father, was rapidly making for himself a brilliant position, without losing a loving devotion to his family—a characteristic very particularly French—it will have been made plain that M. Havart de Gournay had the right to be pleased with life.

At the sunset hour of this particular day the excellent gentleman was gloating over a vellum-bound volume, armoried in faded gold, that displayed—greatest of rarities—the printer's device of Valentin Fernandez. He was inhaling the fragrance of an undreamed prize and licking the chops of greedy anticipation at the thought of many more that might, it appeared, be in his grasp on the morrow.

Barely half an hour before an unknown visitor had secured a welcome by means of the most propitiatory of conceivable offerings—a little packet, under the strings of which was slipped a rather exotic glazed card, bearing beneath a slender Spanish coronet the name of Condesa Lucanor. A lady, the footman stated, requested the favor of a moment's interview with M. de Gournay. She would not detain him many minutes.

THE stranger's entrance had revealed a truly charming old lady, dressed in black silks of becoming—if undeniably foreign—elegance. Bandeaux of white hair, under a fall of black lace, framed a visage of gray, faded beauty, still lit up by eyes of marked brilliancy. She was enveloped in a delicate atmosphere of Parma violets. Her manner, which had withal the ease of *une dame du monde,* was self-assured, even to briskness.

"If M. de Gournay, the well-known connoisseur, will undo this parcel," she had said as he led her to an armchair, "he will save me the difficulty of any preamble and will understand the object of my intrusion."

She spoke the purest French, but with a vibrating, deep Castilian voice that was most attractive.

He had bowed and obeyed. Then, radiantly:

"A Fernandez! Of 1501! Why, madame, this is a treasure! To what do I owe——"

"I will not waste your time," she had answered, with a smile singularly flashing in so wan a face. "I see that the introduction is sufficient for the present. And I feel, now, confident that it will lead to a transaction that may be very pleasant to you—while it will extricate me out of a difficulty. I possess, at my villa in St. Mandé—I have written the address on the card—a collection of books left me by my late husband. I have always understood, although these are not things I understand, that it is a remarkable one. This volume I took haphazard. The binding pleased me. It has, you see, the arms of Lucanor on the side——"

"Are these Lucanor?" had exclaimed the greedy collector in ravishment.

"Yes," had pursued the dame, in pleasant but businesslike tones. "And there are a good many others; the best houses of Castile. I am a lone woman; I have no use for all these *vieilleries.* But, to be frank, I have much use for their worth. I must leave France in something of a hurry, and I require money. I made inquiries. I heard that M. de Gournay collected such things; that he was a man of wealth. In fact—you see I am quite open—I thought that I could get a better price, leaving it to you, a *gentilhomme,* to fix it, than by going to the librarians. You can have the pick; the rest can then go to them. Ah, I see you will. I am fortunate. And so are you—permit me to say so."

After a little more converse at a similar lively rate, the lady had taken her departure.

"Time," she had urged, as he escorted her back to her *fiacre,* "is for me very pressing. I have a world of things to see to. But I shall be in between eleven and twelve for you and have the treasures," she laughed charmingly; "these old *bouquins,* with not a line in them that any one can care to read, are jewels for your bibliophiles, it seems—I'll have all the treasures laid out for you. Yet, be punctual—eleven to twelve is all I can give you. Five minutes past eleven, and I shall conclude you have thought better of it. Then," she threatened him with her fan, "the librarian of St. Geneviève will have first pick."

"Be assured," had said the jubilant collector, "I shall be there at the first stroke."

"BY SAINT ALIPANTIN—" the absurd asseveration the bibliomaniac favored in his moments of melting blandness—"by Saint Alipantin," murmured M. de Gournay, as all in the sunset glow he collated the black-letter leaves, "no, I am scarce likely to be late!"

And, little conscious indeed of the direction in which the stream of his placid life had been diverted by this pleasant whirlwind, he counted the hours that still separated him from the fateful morrow.

AMONG the letters awaiting M. de Gournay upon his breakfast tray—*madame* took her early chocolate amid her own pillows—was one from London, which the gentleman, attired this morning not in slippers and quilted silk dressing-gown but already prepared to sally forth though it was scarce past eight o'clock, took up with some curiosity.

The contents proved of growing interest, for he read right through without thinking of lifting the coffee-pot which his fingers had mechanically sought. These words Mr. Johnstone had written from Bedford Row:

> Dear M. de Gournay—
>
> In view of the near approach of the fifteenth of October, when the tontine scheme of which the management is in our hands comes to maturity, I take upon myself to remind you of the vital importance of your, or your son's, presence *in propria persona* at our office upon that day and not later by any means than twelve o'clock, noon, Greenwich mean time.
>
> The terms of the document, you will remember, are exacting; positively beyond evasion. Personal attendance, rigid punctuality, are essence of contract with reference to the distribution of assets. We should, therefore, be pleased to know of your or your son's being safely across, and indeed in London, as soon as possible. We take this opportunity of stating how matters now stand, hoping, without making any suggestion, that the statement may be of utility to you in framing your plans.
>
> You will recollect that, when last we had occasion to communicate with you upon this subject, there remained, including yourself, only five claimants to a share in due time of the accumulated funds. The same fatality, which had by that time removed eight of the original thirteen depositors, seems to have overtaken, certainly two, possibly three, of the survivors.
>
> M. le Comte de Bondy, we hear, was accidentally shot in the boar-hunt at Compiègne. Colonel Rocheville was massacred during the recent troubles of the South—under circumstances, we are informed, which pointed to a case of personal animosity. And now, as regards Sir Jasper Ferrars, we regret to say that nothing has been heard of him for several months, and his absence, at a time when he ought to be back in England, causes us anxiety.
>
> We had this morning a call from Captain von Hanstedt, who, with you and—as we still hope—Sir Jasper, is a remaining beneficiary. His visit was, we understand, merely intended to be an act of presence. He remains in London, and, we repeat, we should be glad to see you here likewise. We can not refrain from suggesting to you, quite in a private manner, of course—the advisability, in presence of the ill-luck which seems in some mysterious way to follow the steps of the members of the association, to exercise an ever-suspecting vigilance; to keep secret, as far as possible, your intentions and your movements, at least until the fifteenth is past. And lastly, if it can be managed, to induce your son to accompany you on your journey here.
>
> We remain, etc.

M. de Gournay poured out his coffee, drank it and ate his white loaf, lost in a painful muse. "Ever-suspecting vigilance." To one of his bland habits the words bore a strangely unpleasant color. They even dimmed the rosy tints of the coming transaction with the delightful old lady. But he was afforded little time for the vexing speculation. The servant brought in another letter.

"Left by hand," said he, "and the messenger waiting at the door."

This was the communication:

> *M. Henri, Chef de la Sûreté,* commands urgently the attendance of M. Havart de Gournay at the Bureau without the least retard. This, in the name of the Law. But M. Henri begs to add that, if M. de Gournay happens to be contemplating an immediate addition to his well-known collection of rare books, the matter at hand is of the highest personal importance to him. M. de Gournay will be good enough to follow the messenger without being seen to communicate with him.

"The great horned devil is in it!" muttered the excellent man. It was not Saint Alipantin now; M. de Gournay was seriously discomposed. He pocketed his letters, demanded his hat, and his gold-headed cane.

"I follow," he said tartly to the nondescript individual waiting in the vestibule.

And, ten minutes later—it is but a short traject from the Quai Malaquais to the Isle of the Cité—he was introduced to the inner sanctum of the Bureau of Public Safety: a stuffy room, lined from floor to ceiling with green cardboard *dossier* boxes arranged by the thousand in pigeonholes.

M. HENRI, a youngish, tubby man of small size and no very remarkable appearance, save singularly wide, coldly observant eyes, rose from the table upon which was spread a letter he had been conning.

"You will forgive," he began in quick precise words after a gesture toward his own chair, the only one in the room, "the pressing tone of my letter if it has inconvenienced you. Time is very short. I will ask you, first, if you are acquainted with one of the name of Ferrars, an Englishman?"

M. de Gournay started. Like a flash, the attorney's words "ever-suspecting vigilance" leaped out, as it were, to illumine the white hair and the bright eyes of last eve's visitor.

"One Sir Jasper Ferrars is an old friend of mine," he answered quickly.

"Ah, we are on the road; my guess was happy."

A smile flickered across M. Henri's face.

"You will now give me," he went on, "the address, if you have it, of any one with whom you may lately have entered into communication concerning bibliographic treasures—that is the word." He bent sideways over the table and laid a finger upon the letter. "Especially if it be a woman. One moment, you are a better-lettered man than I, but I believe I am right in presuming that the name Ashtoreth refers to a female devil?"

"Yes, certainly." M. de Gournay sank deeper into wonder. "The Semitic Aphrodite, an evil spirit. And, as a fact, I have an appointment with a lady this morning, between eleven and twelve. Yes, and about treasures," he said ruefully, as he saw in imagination these coveted prizes melting into thin air. "And this is the address."

The *Chef de la Sûreté* took the card, glanced at it and rang his bell.

"Send in Vidocq," he ordered to the plain-clothes attendant who appeared at the door. Then, to his visitor, "We will be in time. *Parbleu*, we are lucky! And so are you, M. de Gournay," he added with much meaning, "as you will hear. Ah, Vidocq, I think we have that Montmorency affair well in hand. Here is the address. Take all your measures: the mouse-trap in this case. Have it all fixed up by ten o'clock. Not much time, but, for you—time enough."

M. de Gournay looked with intense curiosity at the celebrated Vidocq, the wily, formidable sleuth-hound whose name was already a terror to whom it might concern: a broad-shouldered massive-headed man, whose appearance, out of service, was that of some sturdy, good-tempered sailor. On duty, there was none who could assume more convincingly the most unlikely disguises.

Vidocq studied the card, repressed a grin of satisfaction, saluted with the hand and disappeared.

"Now, my dear sir," resumed M. Henri, "if you will give me half an hour of your attention, everything in this business, which must of course seem still mysterious, will, I think, be made as clear to you as it is already to us. Your help, besides, will be required to bring to a stop certain sinister machinations which closely concern you. Be good enough to read carefully this letter."

He planted himself with his back to the window and watched M. de Gournay's face. The latter, mounting his spectacle, perused the cryptic document, which ran, in French, as follows:

BELPHEGOR to ASHTORETH, salute and greeting in invisibility! Rejoice and be of firm heart; full success is at hand. You will be relieved to hear that the old fox, who had got such a start of us and had saved his brush so exasperatingly time after time, has at last been run down. We have his skin; he will vex us no more. And now, besides, an unlooked-for piece of luck has come our way. There was, as you know, the cub, still roaming somewhere. We gave no heed to him, for we knew that he had never been let into the secret of the *pot-aux-roses* by his outraged parent.

Now, what do you think we ran up against on the day we paid our polite visit to the parental hearth? Cub himself, if you please! Cub, trotting the covert incognito! I scented him on the spot. I made sure, took him securely in hand. Captivated by my engaging manner, he, of his own accord, dropped the incognito. These busybodies over here had warned him to remain within reach on the morning of our happy day.

In consequence he is now gone on a pretty chase—under the loving care of Abaddon. He will not trouble us, as Abaddon, who brings you this, beauteous Ashtoreth, will no doubt assure you.

And now the full crowning of our labors depends on your success. The rosy-gilled collector of bibliographic treasures is ready to give any price for armorial bindings, and the parcel I have had conveyed to you contains one which will prove killing bait. Make good use of it. Neglect no detail. By the way, since our friend is an accomplished *gourmet*, that little repast we have discussed for his consumption—get it at Chevet's or Perignon's. It should be irresistible.

Abaddon will bring you this letter on Monday at latest. Expect me on Tuesday morning. I have every confidence in your skill and nerve, but certain details will have to be adjusted according to Moloch's success. Prepare a room in which I can retire and yet be within call. At a quarter to eleven by the stroke of the church clock be ready to let me in the back way.

Should any necessity arise to explain my presence to any one, you will not forget that Doktor-Philosophe Goertz, Librarian at Leipzig, is hot upon the hunt for Spanish incunabula. But Lucifer keep off any such necessity!

And now, from eager BELPHEGOR, to radiant ASHTORETH, valediction and invisibility!"

Beads of perspiration had appeared on M. de Gournay's face as he drew near the end of the lines, packed so full of hidden meaning. He looked up at last with dire perplexity in his eyes.

"What do you make of it?" asked M. Henri.

"Nothing that is clear—much that seems sinister."

"It is sinister. And it will soon be made clear. This letter," said M. Henri, "was found on the body of a man—sewn in the lining of his coat—a man, not yet identified, but who is obviously the Abaddon mentioned, killed two nights ago by a young English traveler whom he had tried to murder, in the forest of Montmorency. The affair was cleverly planned—we have already, through examination of the young man, reconstituted the whole story—but the Englishman, though badly mauled, succeeded in suppressing Abaddon, instead of being suppressed himself. The Englishman's name is Ferrars, son of the Sir Jasper Ferrars you mentioned."

M. de Gournay gave a start. The chief, pleased with the result of his methodically dramatic way of exposition, went on, intent upon the next effect:

"BELPHEGOR, who sent Mr. Ferrars to be disposed of abroad by his compeer, Abaddon, is beyond doubt a young fashionable, well-known—and, curiously enough, honorably so, under the present régime—as the Baron de Hanstedt."

Here M. de Gournay as if shot by a spring leaped from his chair. He mopped his brow.

"Hanstedt! The son of my old friend, the friend of Sir Jasper, a murderer! What, in heaven's name—ah, I've got it—the tontine!"

"A tontine!" cried M. Henri, and his eyes flashed satisfaction. "A tontine, of course. We have puzzled a whole day over the thing, and never guessed. The nearest we could think of was a succession. A tontine; you have an interest in it?"

"I have, indeed," gasped the bibliophile. "I—or my son. And so has—" Then, with a sudden recollection of Mr. Johnstone's communication, "So had, I should say, sir Jasper."

"And so has, I take it, M. de Hanstedt, Belphegor. Any others?"

"No. All the others are already gone. Already gone! This is terrible, M. Henri. And I," he wailed, "I who looked forward, with interest, of course, but in calmness, to whatever share might fall to my lot, if I lived to see it—and to my son, if I did not!"

"Your son. Your possible substitute," put in M. Henri, cruelly attentive; "just as Mr. Ferrars, failing his father."

M. de Gournay turned white.

"My boy, too!" he exclaimed. But, checking the new emotion, he drew himself up resolutely. "You were right, sir; the machinations concern me, closely. But they have concerned others. We must work together, you and I. Now, this may help. You do not read English, probably; I will translate for you a communication I received this very morning."

"One moment," said the chief.

He rang his bell, wrote a few words on a slip of paper and handed it to the attendant. Then he turned back to his visitor.

"I am listening."

"It is clear, M. de Gournay," he said when the latter had concluded, "that the fate of M. de Bondy, of Colonel Rocheville, of Sir Jasper Ferrars and that which young Ferrars has by luck escaped were governed by the same purpose: elimination in due time. Elimination under plausible appearances, excluding all suggestion of concerted crime. Elimination at the hands of a clever gang of which this Hanstedt is a member. The case of M. de Bondy will be duly attended to. That of the colonel will be more difficult, disguised as it is as an accident of popular commotion; but we shall sift that also.

"This information of yours is of the highest value; we now know the motive of these crimes and can trace them to one association. The mode, I must tell you, is just now all for these secret companionships. 'Each for all, all for each.' I strongly suspect the fraternity which concerns us to be of good social standing—we have known others of the same kind—the most difficult to trace—educated, elegant even—in good circumstances, but on the lookout for great coups; meanwhile, above ordinary suspicion. What sort of a person is Ashtoreth, the *soi-disant* Spanish *comtesse?*"

"She would be at ease in any salon."

"Ah, I thought so. And Belphegor, we know, is a dandy of the first water. These vampires masquerade among each other under demoniacal names, with a rallying phrase, 'the Invisibles,' for a wager in this case. I wonder," went on M. Henri, peering again at the paper, "whether we have them all here? Abaddon is done with. Ashtoreth and Belphegor I look to have under my thumb before noon. Who may Moloch be? Bah! He'll come to the net, too! It was a weak thing of Belphegor to put anything down on paper, even without an address, even under fancy names and in tangling parables.

"True, there was scarce a chance in a million of its ever falling under the eye of one who had the end of the thread. But there was one. And it is going to cost him dear.

Ah, and what is better, it has saved M. de Gournay, for what had been prepared would have been as plausible, and the result as final, as in the case of Mr. Ferrars, the Comte de Bondy and the colonel. It was a weak thing—*certes*—for instance, to mention a bibliophile—wealthy—old-world—rosy-gilled." M. Henri smiled apologetically.

"Above all to speak of him as likely to give any price for armorial bindings. It took us the whole of the afternoon—the case only came for my examination yesterday morning—to become acquainted, by the help of the leading dealers in fine books, with all the noted collectors in Paris. Then, by elimination, we settled it that M. de Gournay was the distinguished person who was this day to be put out of the way."

M. Henri looked at the clock.

"It will soon be time for you to act—I need not ask," said he gravely, "whether you will play out your part in this drama. You will keep the appointment with Ashtoreth, and before twelve o'clock strikes, this invisible association of society brigands, I give you my word, will be a thing of the past. I can not believe," he added earnestly, "that you can hesitate; Mr. Ferrars, wounded as he is, is lending his help."

"But my son, my son!" cried M. de Gournay. "He is as gravely threatened as I am. I must first——"

"I have already seen to that. He will be warned and well watched over."

The old gentleman drew a grateful sigh and again wiped his forehead.

"I am ready," he said simply.

"Your part," said M. Henri, "will be to follow instructions. There is a *fiacre* waiting for you at the door. Before you sit down to your next meal, the whole affair—as we say in our profession—will be in the sack."

CHAPTER VI

THE DISCREET HOUSE AT ST. MANDÉ

IN A back room of the Villa Armande on the outskirts of Vincennes Woods, the charming old lady who had so briskly carried by assault M. de Gournay's book-loving mind was putting the finishing touch to her toilet.

The cosmetics on her table were of a kind that would have puzzled an Abigail, had Condesa Lucanor kept one. But in the solitary and discreet villa the only servant kept was an old woman of the general-utility order. The paint, the lip-salve, the pencils—which were now being applied with consummate skill—were of gray-white; subduing delicately the natural flush of cheek, the carmine of a small mouth fresh and firm; supplying the "crow's feet" which would not mark naturally, for many years to come, the corners of brilliant black eyes; tinging with ashes the natural brown of finely arched eyebrows. The lady brought the white bandeaux a little closer over temples and ears, shadowed this artistic sexagenarian *tête* under a fall of black lace, gazed at her glass critically and was satisfied.

A moment she stood in front of the window, deeply pensive. The church clock was striking the three-quarters. It meant nothing to her, except that soon now the guileless old man would make his appearance, and she was ready. A frown, however, suddenly hardened her face; she leaned forward, to make sure of what she saw.

A man was hurriedly coming up the path in the waste ground at the back of the discreet house. And, in spite of disguise—the long redingote closely buttoned up, the curly-winged Bolivar hat, the mustache, by nature so black and jaunty, now tinged with gray and drooping, all excellently suited to a person of official pursuits—she knew him.

"What an imprudence!" she said under her voice. "What an imprudence!"

Hastily she ran down and opened the door. He entered and without a word closed the door behind him:

"Has anything happened?" she asked rather breathlessly.

"Nothing but good," he answered, taking her by the waist, about to kiss her lips. But he checked himself. "Your war-paint!" he said and instead kissed her on the nape of the neck. "Nothing but good," he repeated, "nothing but what goes by program. Moloch's stroke is infallible. Properly spitted, the young bird. And the old bird?"

"The old bird," she answered, "may alight any moment. But, Karl——"

"*Chut!* Don't forget. Doktor Goertz."

"Bah!" she went on impatiently "We are alone. I've sent the harridan to Paris on errands. But Karl, Karl, what brings you here? It seems to me absolute madness! You should be in England, *mon cher*. That's your part now. Any accident, any hitch to make you late on the day—and where should we be, all of us?"

She tapped her foot fretfully.

"Yes, I know. But still I felt bound to come. Too much depends on the last stroke. Do you know, *ma toute belle*, that this year's hunt after the millions has been a costly job. I am reduced to my last thousand francs or two. I felt I had to be here. You are clever, the cleverest of us all, perhaps. But still I am the one for the minute detail."

He looked round the toilet-table.

"There!" he said, striding up to it. "These brushes and things—let them be discovered here after your vanishing today, and all the world knows that your age, like the youth of other women, was in the gallipot. And, instead of a nice feeble old lady, what has to be looked for is probably a young woman. Nay," he added and his eyes kindled, "some fiery full-blooded, beautiful she-devil. But, no time for that now. You see how right I was to come. All that stuff should be burned. At any rate, in with it into your pockets. And now let me see your collation."

They went down again and into a front room. With the leader's eye he took in the display and approved. The napery, the glass, the silver, was of the right simplicity, tinged with elegance."

"You have, I am glad to see, specially attended to the coffee. And this *Liqueur des Iles*, is it ready?" He looked at her smilingly.

"Not yet. Safer always to wait for the last moment—in case of contretemps."

"So much the better," he said. "I have had a new idea, a brilliant one. What more natural than that the old gentleman, so wrapped up in his son, should have a heart-attack when he learns—somewhere between one and two this day—what he will hear. Poison? Never! A heart-stroke—and natural enough, poor man! No, keep your stuff. This—" he pulled out a small phial—"is chiefly digitalis, which M. Orfila vouches will stop a man's pulse within an hour or two."

Coolly, carefully, he poured half the contents into the little decanter and corked the phial again.

"And the remainder," he resumed, "to your own beautiful hands for the coffee! Two barrels, you see, lest one should miss fire; the old bird can't expect to escape both! And tonight, Ashtoreth, her own fair self once more, to Brussels. And Belphegor, for London. Moloch for the Hague, where Abaddon will meet him. By the way, at what time did Abaddon leave you?"

"ABADDON? Was he not with you?" She raised her brow, scenting danger.

"Has he not brought you my letter?"

She shook her head fiercely.

"*Sacrament!*" The baron stood a moment petrified. After a long pause, during which the brigand lovers looked fixedly into each other's eyes, "Laurette," he said heavily, "something terrible has happened. What? I can't guess. But if Abaddon has not brought you my—that young cub was a deep one. And if so," following his own thought, "if so, it may mean —— for us."

The rumbling of wheels intruded into their cogitation. She made a bound to the window.

"There comes de Gournay," she said and looked back at him. Then, with forced calmness, settling the laces round her young throat, "Are we going on with this?"

"Will you see it through?" he asked between his teeth.

"I will if you say yes, Karl," she answered.

He gazed back at her, with widening eyes. Then the words exploded from him: "*Bei Gott*, no. I'll not run your neck into it. If we are to come to grief, there's at least, as yet, nothing to connect you with the scheme, after all. Play this morning's game out. It has to be played out, were it but to avert suspicions. But no liqueur for that cursed *ganache!* Put it away! And nothing in the coffee. Send him off rejoicing with his books, that's all—I'll have you safe at any rate!"

The *fiacre* had stopped before the house.

"It is time for me to vanish the way I came. I can't help; I'm only a danger to you. Laurette, Laurette, play for your safety now! Put that liqueur away. Who knows? The game may not really be all lost. Even if we have to go halves with Gournay——"

The bell rang. He leaped toward her, looked into her eyes a second and this time passionately kissed her on the lips. She listened pensively to the sound of his steps in the back passages. Then, upon a second summons of the bell, she went to open the front door. And from that moment the stream of Ashtoreth's life began to assume the ways of a torrent in spate.

The driver of the *fiacre* stood on the threshold, in his broad-brimmed white-glazed hat and his many-caped overcoat.

"This is the Villa Armande, *hein, ma bourgeoise?*" asked the man, in husky voice common to the profession.

"Yes."

"It is here all right, *bourgeois!*" he cried over his shoulder.

The door of the *fiacre* opened. M. de Gournay came down; then he turned round to help out another passenger, whose face was half-hidden in bandages and who limped painfully.

"Good morning, *Comtesse*," said the bibliophile with elaborate ease. "I am in good time, as you perceive. I trust you will not mind my bringing in this young gentleman, who, you see, has met with an accident. Allow me to enter," he went on hastily, noticing the change that had swept over her face; "he is very feeble. I will explain."

She fell back a pace. He, still guiding his companion, brushed past her into the lobby. Instantly the driver closed the door, locked it and pocketed the key.

"You will explain, sir—" she began haughtily, but with a panting breath.

"In a moment, *madame*. Is this the room?" pointing to a door through which could be seen the table, attractively spread with the awaiting *déjeuner*. "Sit down there—*madame* of course permits—" he went on a little thickly. "Sit down, Mr. Ferrars."

A cry rang into the room like the roar of a wounded panther.

"Ferrars! Did you say Ferrars?"

She had fallen back, almost crouching, against the wall, but the next instant she made a spring toward the bandaged man and was arrested, as it were, in midair by the driver's powerful arm.

"*Holà!*—Easy if you please, *ma belle*," he said banteringly, holding her wrist in an inflexible grip. "*Tout beau*, Madame Ashtoreth!"

She had another gasp of rage. Swift and fierce in her movements as a fighting cat, with her free hand she lifted her skirt, revealing a vision of shapely young leg, and drew from her garter a small ivory-handled stiletto. The slender blue blade flashed a second aloft—only to be seized in its flight by the man's bear-like paw and tossed into a corner of the room.

The fierce action had dragged aside the lace veil and, with it, the sedate white bandeaux. With complete deliberation he removed at one stroke the whole structure, baring thereby a head of short but vigorous brown hair, in strange contrast with the ghastly grayness of the face.

"This affair, you see," he said, as now half-fainting she allowed herself to be pressed down into a seat, "has to be carried through roundly."

So saying, he pulled the window open and from a boatswain's whistle threw into the air a piercing, undulating call. A moment later from the back of the house a door was heard, violently thrown open; then sounded footsteps, heavy, irregular, trampling, stumbling.

M. de Gournay, pale, trembling a little even—for men of generous temper are always affected to see violence dealt to a woman—stood mopping his forehead.

Mr. Ferrars, leaning forward in his seat, gazed on the scene with intense interest.

The *soi-disant* cab-driver had his back to the wall, facing the entrance, in a position to keep all present under his eye.

"In here," he ordered.

THRUST forward by two men, who could be seen in the passage but remained outside, Baron von Hanstedt took a pace into the room. He was already manacled. His hair falling over his forehead, his coat torn and half-unbuttoned, testified to a furious struggle. His eyes, blood-rimmed like those of the vanquished wild boar, glared at the squat, broad-shouldered figure that now moved toward him. But he waited speechless. The driver removed his glazed hat.

"I am Vidocq," he said, returning the glare steadily. "And I have got you safe, M. de Hanstedt."

The baron made a dreadful attempt to smile.

"Are you indeed the great Vidocq of whom one hears so much these days? Well, M. Vidocq, you are making an ass of yourself for once. My name is Goertz."

"Pretty name," returned the *policier*, without an inflexion in his voice. "Perhaps not so pretty as others quite as handy—as Belphegor, for instance. But

Hanstedt will do for me, today. Not to mention M. de Gournay here, no doubt Mr. Ferrars can identify——"

From purple the baron grew livid. His wild eyes roamed the room, and fell upon the seated figure with the bandaged head.

"The cub!" he exclaimed in a toneless voice and brought his despairing look round upon the woman, who, with lids half-closed—lips paler than their disguising salve—still lay where she had been thrown.

"Commend me to that for a fair give-away!" said Vidocq. "We may say you've done for yourself—Belphegor. Your case is drawn clear." Then, as if struck by a new idea, he cast his glance over the tempting array on the table and brought it meditatively to rest on the *liqueur* flagon. "I think," he pursued, "you realize it yourself. You're not looking quite so well. Emotion—one understands that. You want a rouser. Try some of this."

As he spoke he half-filled a tumbler with the amber liquid and sniffed at it. Then he handed the glass to the captive, who took it mechanically between his fettered hands.

"It smells delicious," said Vidocq, keenly attentive to the man's face.

For a spell the baron remained stock-still, his eyes on the glass, lost in some dreadful musing. He raised them slowly and rested them in turns, with a renewal of their first fierceness, on each of the three men. But when they came upon the woman, all their hardness vanished; there was nought left in them but a passionate, immeasureable regret.

"I see," went on Vidocq in his matter-of-fact voice. "I quite understand. You have your doubts about the quality of Madame Ashtoreth's *liqueurs*. Well, well, M. Le Professeur Orfila, who is a savant, must look into it."

He stretched an arm to take back the glass. But before the deed could be prevented, Belphegor had raised his joined hands to his mouth, and in quick gulps had swallowed the draft.

"Karl—Karl!" Ashtoreth sprang to her feet, but her scream ended in a wail. She swayed and fell back, covering her face with her hands.

Whatever length of time a glass or two of *liqueur* might have required for action, the effect of this outrageous dose was fulgurating. The baron, dropping the tumbler, gave a gasp. Frantically endeavoring to press his fettered hands to his temples, he suddenly collapsed—a huddled heap, shaken now and again by a writhing convulsion.

Ferrars had jumped up. M. de Gournay, leaning forward over the back of a chair, stared, frozen with horror.

"There," he murmured to himself, "but for the mercy of God, is the case that was meant to be mine."

Vidocq, with his great bushy brows knitted, was pursing his lips. His whole air was one of overwhelming vexation:

"You've made a slip there, Vidocq, my friend," he muttered at last. "Yes, a bad slip! Yet who the devil would ever have believed that he—well, Belphegor has but cheated the galleys, if not the scaffold."

The dying man's sterterous breathing had ceased. A heavy stillness reigned in the room. After a few seconds a new sound from outside broke the spell—the sound of hurried wheels abruptly checked—of hurried footsteps. Then the bell again and instantly, as the door opened, an eager voice:

"M. Gournay! Is M. de Gournay here?"

A man in groom's livery darted into the room, stumbling over the body on the floor.

"Ah, *monsieur, monsieur!* Quick! Our poor young master——"

He paused, casting a scared look at the scene; then, dumbly he held out a slip of paper. M. de Gournay had grown ashen white.

"What is it? Ah, God! It is André—it's my son! What is it?"

He snatched the paper from the messenger, tried to read, passed his hand over his dazed eyes and read again. A sighing groan, heart-rending, rose from his throat. He threw his arms above his head and Vidocq was only just in time to catch him as he fell forward.

"A fit—that's what it is. A *coup de sang*, poor gentleman," said the *policier*, with more feeling than might be expected from one of that kidney. "I can guess. Well, what has happened?" he went on, turning half-round to look up at the groom.

"A duel—this morning—with one of those bandits of *demi-solde* Bonapartists. Ah, my poor young master!"

Vidocq drew the note from the unconscious man's fingers and read out—

"Come quickly, if you would find our André still alive."

There was a moment's silence, and then he said:

"So—that was the scheme, a duel with a *bretteur!* We were just in time, here—but too late for the son." Then, resuming command, "Mr. Ferrars, there is still work for me here, and then I must devote myself to this pretended half-pay, the *spadassin.* You, my boy," he said to the groom, "must stop here. Mr. Ferrars will take this worthy gentleman back to his home. It's a stroke, a bad stroke, I fear," he added, after looking at M. de Gournay's face. "You may congratulate yourself, sir, on a rather miraculous escape from the crew of Invisibles."

CHAPTER VII

DEAD MEN'S SHOES

"AND the last piece of evidence in this long-laid plot, at least as far as I am personally concerned," said Mr. Ferrars to Mr. Wapshot, "came last night. A letter from the butler at Stanton, which I found at the Piazza. An answer to an inquiry I had sent, in my own name by the way, from Paris the day before my departure."

They were passing under the great plane-trees of Gray's Inn Gardens, that swayed and roared in the gusts of a tempestuous wind, on the morning of the fifteenth of October.

Mr. Ferrars, still rather lame, his face badly scarred, but now free from its bandages, was leaning on the arm of his friend and legal counselor on the way from the latter's offices in Gray's Inn Square to those of Messrs. Johnstone & Mesurier in Bedford Row.

"The man states that he knows nothing of any letter for Captain Hanstedt and that he certainly forwarded none. He adds, unfortunately," said Mr. Ferrars, "that he has no news from his master. It bodes ill."

Mr. Wapshot had listened that morning to a detailed account of his client's experiences, but without committing himself to an opinion. After a span of thoughtful silence, he dryly remarked:

"All this, my dear sir, if it does bode ill for Sir Jasper, may mean a singular change in the state of your own affairs. Well, in less than an hour, we shall know where we stand."

"I am still much in the dark. Will you not explain?"

"I really have no knowledge of the matter. It is all in Johnstone and Mesurier's keeping—and, no doubt, they will explain it—if the occasion arises. I have been asked to have you within call. And I am thankful—for, if I don't actually know, I think, I guess—that I have brought you here in time."

They were ringing at the attorney's office. The clerk who opened the door requested them, with Mr. Johnstone's compliments, to step up-stairs and wait in a private room.

Ferrars sat at a bare table and, leaning his head on his hands, lost himself in brooding cogitation.

Mr. Wapshot, however, in the midst of his professional reticence, showed distinct signs of nervousness; pacing the room; consulting his watch at ever shorter intervals; peering with unmistakable anxiety into the broad coldness of Bedford Row, whenever wheels or footsteps were heard approaching the front door. A great clock outside in the passage struck the half-hour; then the three-quarters. Within the room the silence between the two men remained unbroken. At last, the deeper strokes of the hour began to fall.

"Twelve o'clock," said Mr. Wapshot, with attempted indifference consulting his own watch for confirmation. "Twelve by Greenwich."

The last vibration had scarce vanished, when the door was opened:

"Mr. Johnstone's compliments," said the clerk, "and will Mr. Ferrars and Mr. Wapshot be so good as to step down to his room."

Mr. Wapshot heaved a sigh of satisfaction and smilingly motioned his client on.

Four gentlemen, seated round the great mahogany table, rose on their entrance. Every countenance behind the mask of official decorum betrayed an expectant agitation, tinged, in the case of the head of the firm, with a noticeable look of concern. This personage was a pompous man with a large handsome face.

"Mr. Ferrars," he began in a rich unctuous voice and a self-conscious precision of speech, "allow me to offer you welcome—although your presence in this room today betokens the possibility—nay, I fear, the probability—of some tragic occurrence. I am glad, I say, to see you, at least, in attendance on this occasion. I will explain presently. Let me introduce my partner, Mr. Mesurier, also Mr. Parker and Mr. Willis, who represent Tellson's Bank."

The young man bowed; then in silence he took the seat that was offered.

"Mr. Ferrars," went on the attorney, in his methodical, *ore rotondo*, board-room manner, "these gentlemen and ourselves have met for the purpose of bearing testimony to the actual attendance *in propria persona*, before the hour of twelve noon—in accordance with a stringent clause of the document which you see on the table and which you will presently have an opportunity to examine—of certain persons, beneficiaries under the provision of a scheme which, for want of another name, we must call a tontine. The scheme in question, however, differs in many ways from the usual device of annuity which goes under that appellation.

"Your interest in the funds involved—and I may as well say at once, the sum is an important one—was only contingent. By your father's absence, it has become capital. Further, by the inexplicable absence of two others, who, unlike yourself, were fully aware of every clause in this deed, your interest has become total.

"On some other occasion, if you care, I shall tell you the full history of this extraordinary scheme which, started eight and twenty years ago, has reached maturity on this day. Now, however, not to trespass unduly upon the time of these gentlemen, I will only deal with the salient points.

"During the Summer of the year 1789—at a time when all who had eyes to see the swiftly approaching upheaval in France gave anxious thought to the future—a number of gentlemen, most of them French, but with them some of other nationalities—one of these being Sir Jasper Ferrars—organized among themselves—there were, to be precise, thirteen of them—a tontine of unusual character, regulated with meticulous care and with the stringent insistence upon the letter as well as the spirit of the agreement.

"The essence of the scheme was that a sum of one million French *livres*, or in sterling money forty thousand pounds, subscribed by the thirteen original members, was to be deposited outside Revolutionary France—in fact, with an English bank of repute. It was to be left at compound interest for the space of twenty-eight years—after which the accumulated capital would be distributed, each in the proportion of his original subscription, among the survivors, or, in default of any of them, their surviving eldest sons.

"You are aware, no doubt, Mr. Ferrars, that a capital sum placed at five per cent. compound interest doubles itself in fourteen years. Twenty-eight have elapsed since this contract was made—or rather since the money was lodged in its entirety at the bank—and that was on October 14, 1789. The original capital has therefore quadrupled itself. In other words, it now amounts to a little over one hundred and sixty thousand pounds."

The attorney paused a moment, looking, no doubt, for signs of overwhelming emotion in the young man's face. But to his great astonishment finding nothing of the kind, he resumed in the same orating style:

"The point which, as I hinted before, touches you closely and brings you, Mr. Ferrars, into a position which it was your father's intention—for reasons best known to himself; I will not enter into that painful family matter here—which it was your father's intention, I say, to keep you from if he could, is that by your actual presence here at this moment, of which we take due cognizance, you become beneficiary, beyond the reach of dispute, of the whole of this accruing fund."

Ferrars had grown pale. He was a little giddy, and he had to clear his voice as he said:

"This accession of fortune is very strange, singularly unexpected. But not stranger than the experiences I have met with during this last week."

"To say the truth," went on Mr. Johnstone, considerably surprized at this laconic attitude, "we had reason to fear that something untoward might have happened to Sir Jasper. But we had every reason to expect the appearance of the young Baron Hanstedt and that of M. de Gournay, or, in his default, of his son. There is," said Mr. Johnstone, solemnly, "something sinister attaching to a tontine of this kind, which at best is only a gamble of death and hazard, not an insurance."

"Well may you think so, sir," said Ferrars gravely. "Of the last five survivors, my father would seem to have been hunted—hunted relentlessly by some unknown enemies, invisible, but suspected everywhere in everything, till they appear to have driven him wellnigh out of his mind—by now no doubt to an unknown death, or he would be here in my stead at this moment.

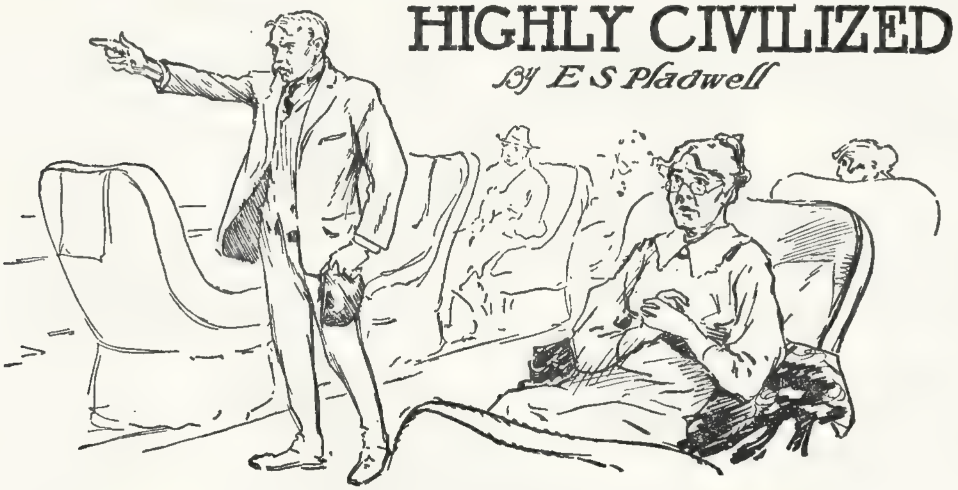
"As for M. de Gournay: he died, as I heard, just before I left Paris; died of the death of his son, who was murdered by a duelling bravo. I myself only escaped assassination by a hair's breadth. And Baron von Hanstedt, the organizer for a certainty, of all these 'suppressions,' as he called it, if not indeed of many others among the members of the tontine, has made away with himself in the hour of detection."

Here Mr. Wapshot, who, unable to repress his not unpleasurable emotion, had been almost dancing in his chair, broke all professional decorum and sprang to his feet.

"Mr. Ferrars," he exclaimed. Then, snapped his fingers, "No—Sir Adrian! I congratulate you!"

HIGHLY CIVILIZED

By E S Pladwell



Author of "No Brains," "According to Breed," etc.

"THE country's not what I expected," admitted the little, white-haired New England woman as she looked out of the Pullman window for the thousandth time and appraised the treeless Arizona scenery. "Every town's just a lot of paved streets, tellygraph wires, trolley-cars, policemen, town lots for sale, hotels, stores, ice-wagons, jitneys, restauraws, electric signs, and little boys selling ice-cream cones when the train gets into the depot. I declare, I might just 's well be back in Concord, New Hampshire!"

The short, middle-aged man with the droopy mustache and the mild and apologetic manner, seated across the aisle, agreed with her. She had found him so far a perfect gentleman, and, as they came farther West, he seemed to have an increasing knowledge of the country, making him a valuable traveling companion. He had boarded the train at Chicago. He said he sold town lots in Gila City, but the rest of his life was sealed to her. He seemed to be reticent and diffident about himself.

"Yes, ma'am," he corroborated, mildly. "It ain't what it used to be, that's shore. Time was when a gent needed a six-shooter in each hand and a derringer between his teeth in these parts, but now all he needs is a sharp brain and a good lawyer. We're all civilized."

"That's it," came her sharp New England voice as she rescued her Paisley shawl from sliding off the seat beside her. "For a person once sot on romance like I was, this is right disappointing."

The mild little man stroked his long, droopy mustache and his very sharp gray eyes looked at her keenly.

"Oh," he said, at length. "Romance. You're thinkin' of stories about stage-coaches and Injuns and bad-men and such like. I see." He looked out of the car window. "They wasn't romances," he continued absently. "They was jest nuisances."

"Well, I expected something different, anyhow," she demurred nasally. "Why, last town we passed through, lots of men wore derby hats, and the only Indian I've seen yet was a two-hundred-pounder—who might be wuth something if he'd work—peddling bows and arrows at twenty-five cents each. My sakes, I didn't expect savagery, but I didn't expect this, either!"

The quiet little man, who wore a blue Chicago-tailored suit, patent-leather shoes, a medium high collar and a two-dollar silk tie, appraised the little woman more closely and understood. She was in the position of a thirsty traveler discerning a cool, timber-lined lake only to find it all a mirage when she got there. He gathered she had saved for twenty years to make this trip, too.

"Well," he admitted, at length, "mebbe there was romance. I dunno. Suit yourself."

The mild man pointed toward the northwest, making the elderly little woman look out of the window.

"See that patch of green with houses on it, jest under that chalk-colored mesa over there?" he asked. "That's now the Gila County Country Club, ten miles from town, where the plutocrats chase little golf balls around. Twenty years ago there wasn't anything there, not even a plutocrat. Nothin' but a road that came around the foot of the mesa. That's where the Gila City stage disappeared."

The little woman experienced something like a thrill.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed. "Dew tell!

"I will," he responded. "You see, there was a ruffian named Smith or Jones or somethin' operatin' around there with a gang tryin' to revive the bad old days. Did a pretty good business, too. Noboby could catch him. Well, one day the stage come down from the old Excelsior mine with thirty thousand dollars in gold-dust and no passengers. Nobody but the driver and one guard. This robber, Jones, laid for the stage around the turn under the mesa. He was an eddicated cuss and had some new ideas about robbin'; so before the stage come along he sprinkled little sticks of dynamite under mesquite branches on the road. Of course the driver didn't think anything of twigs, so the horses went steppin' right into the dynamite."

"Land sakes!" gasped the little woman. "It must have been turrible on the poor horses!"

"Yes, ma'am; but that's romance, I suppose. Anyhow, the horses went down, the stage stopped, the driver and guard was shot, the wagon was looted, the horses was killed after the ones still alive had dragged the stage up a rock-gully off the road and then the stage was blown into bits with more dynamite. For two mortal weeks Gila City wondered what happened to the stage, but the search-parties never found out."

"My stars!" exclaimed the little woman. "How did they ever learn about it?"

"Oh, Jones went East, drifted into some city underworld, got shot for pickpocketing, and confessed jest before he died. Ho-hum. We're gittin' near Gila City now. You see that big buildin' among the flower-gardens under that brown mountain? That's the Sisters of Mercy Home for Orphans. That big gray buildin' on the slope below it is the county hospital—cost a million dollars. Right there's where Mocho and his Apaches swung down from the mountains fifty years ago and massacred everybody.

"They got a bronze tablet about it in the yard of the Orphan Home, dedicated last year by the governor and the mayor of Gila City makin' speeches in plug hats and frock coats while the thermometer registered one-hundred-and-thirty. The First Arizona Infantry Band and the Gila Symphony Orchestra furnished jazz, Cho-pang and Meddlesome music. Swellest ceremony we ever had. Twenty thousand people present and not less than four hundred two-gallon hats."

"But the Apaches?" insisted the little New Englander.

"Oh, yes. Well, there was ninety of them and ninety settlers, mostly women and children. The fight begun down here and the white folks gradu'lly retreated toward Crystal Springs, up behind that orphan asylum, but they didn't quite git there. The shootin' and stabbin' kept on all day, till fin'lly there was only one wounded white man left and about two Injuns. The white man was down; his ammunition was gone; he was mortal wounded; there wasn't a chance for help—and these two Injuns was comin' on him fast. And yet he got them Injuns."

"How?" demanded his tense companion.

"Why—this is a snake country, ma'am. In the old days folks used to have whisky and things handy in case of rattlers. Sometimes they also carried potassium permanganate, which is deadly pizen. This fellow had both. So, when he saw the jig was up, he poured the potassium into his whisky and let the bottle rest beside him. Then he died and the Injuns partook of refreshments, bein' partial to whisky."

"Well—I declare!" commented the little woman. "He must have been a right smart man. How did they ever find it out?"

"Oh, some other Injuns arrived and partook, and them that didn't drink told about it later. That bottle wiped out about half a tribe. The sinners around here say the bronze tablet ought to been shaped like a bottle of whisky, but the Prohibitionists voted it down; so the tablet looks like a tombstone."

THE train was drawing into the Gila City yards now and certain travelers in the Pullman car prepared for departure, while the white-coated porter prepared for tips. The little New England woman was bound for the coast and sat still. So did the quiet, mild little man in the seat across the aisle. For a time he had been highly talkative. Now he became diffident again.

"I thought you were going to get off here," she remarked at length, while the train was passing strings of freight-cars.

"No ma'am," he murmured. "My office is here, but I live at Esmeralda, ten miles beyond. I commute to and fro in my auto."

"Oh," said the little lady.

Somehow she felt as if she had been robbed of something. That last remark might have been made at Concord, New Hampshire. The little lady did not expect or desire to be amid the wild happenings she had read about in her youth, but, after scrimping and saving for years for this trip—the one wild adventure of her life—she felt cheated.

Everything was so prosaic!

This matter-of-fact, mild little Westerner beside her was an example. He could relate hair-raising episodes when he wanted to, but they were all from the past. He himself was so diffident and self-effacing that she wondered how such men made their way into a country where once road-agents, bad-men and Apaches held sway. He did not look like the virile, red-blooded, self-reliant type she thought belonged to the West. He was a real-estate agent, selling lots at ten dollars down and ten dollars per month. Even now he sat hunched over, looking absently out of the window, probably ciphering on some petty real-estate deal. She almost disliked him.

The train rolled into the huge depot, where well-dressed men and women walked about or stood chatting in groups. Past the depot was a green park bounded by palm trees, and beyond that she could see trolley-cars, pedestrians, traffic-officers, stores with big signs on them, uniformed messenger-boys on bicycles, a yellow water-cart sprinkling the asphalt street and countless automobiles. It was the usual again.

"That's our Carnegie library," said the mild little man, pointing to a stately brownstone structure. "Beyond that's the court house, with the gilded dome. Over there on the hill is the Gila City Union High School, and just under it's the City Auditorium. That broad buildin' up the street is the John C. Fremont Opera House, opened by Sary Bernhardt a few years ago. The skyscraper beyond is the Chamber of Commerce Buildin'—one of the tallest in Arizona.

"On the other side of the track you can see the Armour branch packin'-house and the office buildin' owned by the Excelsior Mines Company." And then he pointed out other objects of interest, with a certain diffident pride, till all the landmarks of Gila City were enumerated.

The long wait at the station finally ended.

"All aboard!" came the voice of the conductor.

The mild little man became silent and reached up to the rack for his suitcase and coat, preparing for the next station. The little woman took a last look at this most commonplace city, and the train started.

At that instant a little auto whirled in front of a street-car, turned on two wheels and halted just beyond the little park. A tall, nervous-looking man in a brown suit, carrying a bag, jumped quickly out of the machine in company with a chunky, swarthy, excited man wearing a wide-brimmed hat. They crouched suddenly and dashed toward the rear end of the train, disappearing from the woman's sight.

And then, just as the train gained headway, her amazed eyes looked upon painted Indians with red, white, ochre and blue war-bonnets, yelling cowboys firing pistols and colorful pinto ponies bearing silver-mounted saddles!

They swirled down the street like a cyclone, shrieking violent language and scattering pedestrians and traffic-policemen impartially. They split at the street-car and raced around it, with one husky cowboy in the lead, wearing heavy white sheepskin chaps and madly firing a big pistol in his right hand. Behind him was a hideous Indian, half-naked, spurring a maddened brown-and-white pony to faster speed and trying to aim at something with a Winchester. Behind them swept some thirty other excited and picturesque persons, including one giant with a violent red shirt and a conical Mexican sombrero that blew off. The pistol-shots came in gusts.

"Blank cartridges!" shouted some tourist in the Pullman car, where every one had rushed to the windows. "It must be movie actors."

"Blanks, hey?" contradicted another. "Did you see that window shot out of the station? Did you see that street-lamp shatter?"

"Land sakes!" gasped the little New England woman.

Now that the thrill had actually come she was not sure she liked it. She noted out of the tail of her eye that the mild little man alongside her looked a bit nervous also.

"They're aiming at something!" exclaimed an excited man in the car, opening a window and craning his neck toward the rear. "Nope—they've quit shooting. They've got off their horses. I wonder what's the matter?"

"I guess it's nothin' much," offered the mild little man. "Anyhow, the police will fix it. Gila City's got a pretty good force."

The train sped on and strings of freight-cars cut off the vision of the man at the window, who returned to his seat. Soon the yard-limits were passed and the folks in the car subsided after making little guesses about the matter. Then the last house in Gila City was passed and the train traveled across the open country, with the paved auto-road running parallel to the track.

"Look!" yelled some one suddenly.

THE little woman peered out of the car window with the rest, seeing a highly novel sight. A big seven-passenger auto, driven by a gum-chewing chauffeur with a plaid cap, was catching up with the train most handily, while its cargo of picturesque persons held on to the sides of the machine and showed a lavish display of rifles and pistols.

Two ferocious, brown-painted Indians crouched on the running-board with their war-bonnets standing straight out in the wind. Three cowboys with white sheepskin chaps and two with black ones crouched beside the red-shirted person in the rear of the tonneau and yelled maledictions toward the train, accompanied by the voices of two Indians with violent red-and-black blankets, seated alongside the driver.

"They seem excited about something," volunteered a tourist, just ahead of the little woman.

"Mebbe they are," agreed the mild little man. "It looks like it's got somethin' to do with this train."

"Land sakes!" gasped the little New Englander, turning white.

The auto passed the car and drew abreast of the engine, far ahead. The train began to lose speed just at a curve that shut off a view of the auto. The train went still slower, and the machine came into view—this time with only three men in it. Then the train stopped.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" inquired a nervous tourist to the world in general.

"I guess they're lookin' for some one on the train," offered the mild little man.

"Maybe they're hold-up men!" suggested the nervous tourist, making several persons, including the New England woman, jump.

The little man with the droopy mustache looked at the speaker mildly.

"No—no; I guess they're all right," he ventured. "I think I know some of 'em. That big, dark fellow in the red shirt's Felix Lopez, owner of a hay, grain and feed store, and one of the fellows in the white woolly pants is Bob Sherman, who sings tenor in the Christian Science church.

I think I rec'nize one or two others, though the Injuns is total strangers. I know every Yuma, Zuñi, Mojave and Apache around here, but them head-gears looks like Sioux or Kiowa. Mebbe Sherman brought 'em in from Carlisle, where his brother's a perfesser. I guess that's it. I don't know them, an' they don't know me."

"But what are they doing here? Why are they dressed that way? Why are they acting like this?" volleyed the nervous tourist.

"Search me," shrugged the mild little person. "I'm jest gittin' home from Chicago."

The little New England woman began to gurgle.

"Merciful heaven, what's that?" she spluttered, pointing with a trembling hand toward the forward door.

The door had opened and a grim, sinister figure came in and stood looking the passengers over haughtily with beady brown eyes. In his right hand was a great, long pistol that hinted of sudden death. In his full cartridge-belt was a glittering hunting-knife. Above the belt was a screaming red shirt. Above that was a violent green bandanna, and above that was a heavy-browed, heavy-mustached, coffee-colored face, set in an expression of majestic wrath. A conical Mexican sombrero, long black trousers and high-heeled cowhide boots made the apparition look even taller and more frightful than it was.

"Land sakes!" gibbered the little New England woman to the mild little man alongside her. But that person had slumped deeper into the plush seat and pulled his fedora hat over his eyes.

The door opened again behind the intimidating Mexican, and a war-bonneted Indian with dabs of red and green over his cruel-looking eyes and mouth rushed in, holding a big Winchester in both hands. He passed the Mexican and started looking keenly at the various passengers in the seats just as the rear door opened and two big cowboys appeared, holding pistols in their hands.

"Oh!" choked the little New Englander, trembling all over.

The horrible Indian advanced steadily, holding the Winchester at the ready. The little woman wished she were somewhere else—anywhere else. Her heart was bumping tremendously. She wanted to shriek. But all she could do was cower in the chair like the mild little man opposite.

The hideous Indian came closer till she could almost touch the muscles on his brown-painted arm and torso; but she did not try to touch him. She only endeavored to slide down off the seat. But the Indian gave her hardly a glance. He turned to the opposite seat, reached out a hand, took the hat off the mild little man, grunted, replaced the hat and passed on.

"Here they are!" shouted two excited voices suddenly from the rear of the car.

With a yell the Indian tore down the aisle, where the two cowboys were locked in the embraces of two other men—one a tall person in a brown suit and the other a swarthy, chunky man with black hair. Shouting, the red-shirted Mexican also sped toward the rear of the car.

The Indian grabbed the neck of the tall man, who turned and hit backward viciously with his elbow, while the cowboy tried to hold him. But he freed an arm, and a fist suddenly crashed into the painted face of the Indian. The latter jumped back, reversed his Winchester and made a wild swing at the tall man's dodging head. The rifle-butt caught the side of the car's drinking-tank and smashed it in, while the cowboy jammed a fist into the tall man's face. The latter, yelling savage maledictions, tried to free another arm.

Meantime, the other cowboy was trying to hold the stocky man with the black hair, who wriggled and writhed until he broke away, charging down the aisle just in time to run into the red-shirted Mexican.

The big Mexican took the stocky man by the throat, spun him around, kicked him, hit him on the head with the barrel of the big pistol, knocked him into an empty seat, jumped on him, picked him up and whirled him into the aisle, where the cowboy was coming up. Other cowboys and Indians began running into the car, where panic-stricken tourists gibbered and shrieked. The place was bedlam.

IT ALL happened within a minute. The fracas came swirling down the aisle, a mixture of wriggling bodies and arms, a mad chorus of grunts and yells and, finally, a shot.

The little New England woman was close to hysterics. The sudden shot almost finished her nerves. But, even with her senses going and her eyes blurred by acrid smoke, she noticed the mild little man opposite her take off his hat and arise. There was something entirely new in his attitude—something mandatory and compelling.

"Stop!" he yelled. "That'll be about enough! Cut it out!"

The red-shirted Mexican, who was nearest him, turned and then straightened up suddenly, looking surprized and embarrassed. One of the cowboys also looked and straightened. There seemed to be something overpowering about the little man.

"Gee!" shouted the cowboy. "Quit it—quick!" This to the others.

As if some power had arrested their hands, all the combatants dropped their business and turned toward the little man, even to the tall person in the brown suit and the stocky one with the black hair.

"I didn't want to git into this because I ain't officially home yet," snapped the little man, no longer mild. "But now it seems I got to. Darn it, I wanted a peaceful trip! What do you think you are—road-agents shootin' up a train?"

"No, sir," replied the cowboy, awkwardly. "We was only nabbin' a couple o' crooks."

"Them?" asked the little man, pointing to the tall and short persons.

"Yessir—them," chimed in the big Mexican. "We chased 'em four miles after we seen 'em get on this train. They must have sneaked into this car from the rear when you wasn't noticing. They was hiding under the seats."

"Well, what did they do in the first place?"

"Skipped with the funds."

The little man looked curious, so the Mexican explained:

"We was giving a Wild West show—roping, steer-tying, fancy riding, bulldogging and all the rest. Some of the boys got the idea a month ago; so we organized and incorporated the Gila City Round-up Company, like they did at Pendleton and Cheyenne. Advertised for two weeks in advance. Had a fine crowd—eight thousand people, not including nine hundred autos coming in by the side gates. Twelve thousand dollars receipts, seven thousand clear profit. Share and share alike was our motto." His face darkened to a sinister scowl. "And these two crooks was secretary and treasurer!"

"They had a little flivver outside the gate," interrupted the cowboy. "They beat it for the train jest as soon as the tickets was all sold—blew away with every last cent in a satchel. Didn't even aim to give us cigaroot money! Tom Mushmelon, the Injun, here, seen 'em blow with the coin; so he yells and we all starts after 'em. The darned, measly skunks—they oughta be hung!" And he cast a venomous look at the late secretary and treasurer.

The little man with the droopy mustache looked thoughtful as the train-crew began to arrive in the car.

"Well," he decided, "I guess I'll have to look into this. Take me back to Gila in your auto. Let's go." And he picked up his suitcase.

The little white-haired New England lady, still wobbly from fright but also fairly twitching with curiosity, plucked at the arm of the cowboy alongside the seat.

"Who—who is that gentleman?" she gurgled, pointing toward the gray-eyed little man who had traveled in the Pullman car from Chicago.

"Him? Why, that's 'Lightnin' Bill' Burke, sheriff of Gila County."

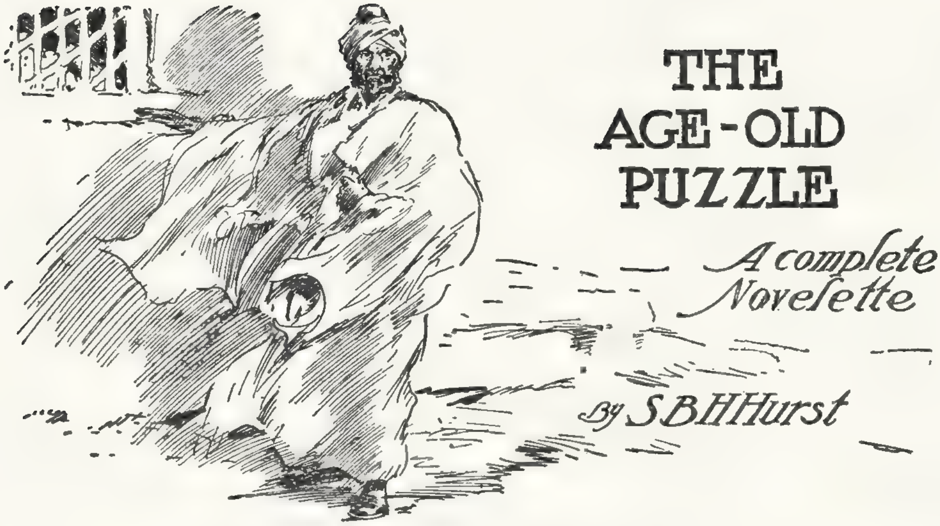
"Land sakes!" she exclaimed. "Sheriff? Him? That little man? Why, he didn't seem peart enough to harm a fly!"

The cowboy smiled cryptically.

"Don't you fool yourself about him!" he advised. "That fellow's killed more people than any other man in Arizona! Got twenty notches on his gun. Don't worry about him, ma'am; he'll make his way in the world!"

"My stars!" gulped the little woman. "Land sakes! And here I was settin' right alongside him all the way from Chicago!" Her eyes opened wider. "And he said he was a real-estater!"

"Yes, ma'am. So he is," nodded the cowboy, getting ready to leave with the rest. "He had to have somethin' on the side to keep occupied. He terrorized the roughnecks clean out of the county. That's the man that cleaned up Gila and made her civilized!"



THE AGE-OLD PUZZLE

A complete Novelette

By S. B. H. Hurst

Author of "Dirty Jim," "The Parabola of a Prophet," etc.

THERE are strange things in Calcutta. There is an undercurrent of thought that is mysterious—that has to do with things in which some believe and which some say do not exist. There are happenings concerning which every native above the age of five knows every detail, but about which no white man ever hears. Except . . . .

There are legends. There is the story which says that the central office of the uncanny system of native telegraphy lurks there; and the Government has spent *lakhs* of rupees in trying to learn how the system is operated. Now it knows as much as it did before it spent the first *lakhs*.

And concerning this, it is remembered that the movements of the British during the mutiny were a matter of common knowledge on the bazaars long before officials in the district heard a word. The defeat at Magersfontein was being talked about by the servants in their *godowns* before the cables sent the news to Fort William. Then there is the tale about "Underground Calcutta"—this has no reference to the Black Hole—where a regular town exists: a town to where captured British women and children were taken—where they lived and died.

Every native knows about it, but not one would admit it, because he is not fond of death. This place was never discovered by the English, nor did they find a clue to its entrance, much as they sought it, while they spoke of it as "a fairy-tale;" but men have told shudderingly of appealing white women faces, suddenly seen to vanish from barred windows of dwellings, which on investigation were found to be simple native houses with no passages leading underground.

With a refinement of cruelty, the natives allowed the captured women to write pathetic letters to their frantic husbands so that they might more thoroughly enjoy the impotent efforts made to find the place. But there is so much of this sort of mystery. There are those who are in a position to know who laugh at the ingenious attempts of the Indian Government to explain the "gold loss" of India, saying that a powerful native secret society is hoarding all this missing gold—squeezed from every one of the more than two hundred million men and women—for a certain end, in a mighty treasure-house beneath the city. For it is a fact that tons of gold disappear annually, and for that reason the Government refuses to establish a gold coinage.

The "certain end" needs no elucidation. Think for a moment how cheaply that mass of people live and remember that a native dwelling with as much as five dollars' worth of furniture in it is rarely seen! And in spite of police system, the secret service, the supervision of the fire department and many other means of investigation, Calcutta still remains a city of shadowy places, where the unknown walks hand in hand with the mysterious and whisper hints at a life-and-death secret.

In the dark and noisome places behind the bazaars, hiding furtively in a maze of native warrens, are fallen Englishmen, "gone native," who are never abroad by day, flitting like some loathsome kind of bat among the smells and shadows.

The police are supposed to be aware, either directly or indirectly, of the existence of some of these creatures, although it is admitted that there are some of whom they have never heard—who have abandoned hope and self-respect, who are lost to their kind, but who could never be placed in a cell. How these men live is another mystery of that extraordinary city which no Englishman claims to know.

Sometimes a few bits of wood will come together in an eddy, and some unseen force will keep them together; so it is with the human driftwood of Calcutta, flotsam, the tale of whose lives, if well told, would make the "Arabian Nights" look pale. Different causes took them there; different reasons keep them there. But, in their different ways, they are all vitally interesting, and they touch the native life as no other white man can touch it. There may be even one of them, an Englishman, who does know Calcutta!

The above might have been written before what follows took place. Being India, there is no need to change it. For, however great the happening, however extraordinary the apparent change, it would have no more effect on the people or the country than the throwing of a stone into a pool has on the water. There is a slight splash, a momentary hole—then, and afterward, the pool is exactly as it was before!

IT WAS midnight, and Marquis Lane resounded to the shouts and knocks of half a dozen sailors, who desired greatly to enter number twelve and were barred from doing so by the garden gate, which the servant refused to open—letting them know in very certain terms that their paradise was somewhere else, where kisses were cheaper. For Marquis Lane contains the residences of those houris whose smiles cost more apiece than a sailor earns in a week.

The year was at its hottest, and the heavy air was full of the smoke of cooking-fires, dying down after the evening meal—that alluring odor of wood and dried dung that hovers in the everlasting call of the East. The flying foxes swung across the crescent of an old moon; the ancient trees were asleep, and the high garden walls added to the depth of the shadows. But behind it all, as a background for all the sights, sounds and smells, was the eternal voice of Calcutta, rising and falling like the roar of a rapid, deep river.

Partly amused and partly irritated, a man stood in the deeper shadows, watching the ineffectual efforts of the group of sailors. Sometimes he muttered a remark concerning the inefficiency of the police patrol, for he, too, had business at number twelve. He had, however, no desire to be welcomed by the sailors, who, were he to show himself, would imagine in their sheep-like way that his wish to visit the same house made him one of them, and who would be greatly irritated if he did not join them.

The herd instinct is so strong among the lesser-minded that the individualist is as much anathema to the socialist as is the infidel to the religious bigot; and the man who refused to join the sailors in their vicious pleasures would have to show his superiority with his fists, since such animals are only ruled by force.

But the servant behind the garden gate had dealt too long with such cattle to stand in any awe of them. A sudden strong stream from a hose effectually scattered the amorous mariners, who went their way, a swearing crowd, to seek cheaper smiles and less aseptic kisses.

Then the man advanced from among the shadows, and the effusively polite native servant opened the gate for him—leading the way into the house.

To be dressed at that hour, or at any hour, in a plain white suit, without insignia, does not proclaim distinction; but such was the dress of the visitor to number twelve. Yet the woman in disturbed negligée who received him did so with a deference money could never have procured and hastened to get him a "peg" with her own hands—a peg he accepted, for the night was a thirsty one, sitting on a cane chair near a tumbled bed, under a lazy punka.

"Any news?" the man spoke shortly.

"None at all, sir."

"He has been here?"

"Twice—the fat pig. I tell you, I'm

earning every anna, being polite to that fat, black hog!"

The visitor looked contemplatively at his well-kept fingers; then he smiled quizzically.

"Must be the devil," he drawled. "But—you know?"

"Oh, I ain't making no kick," she hastened to say nervously—a woman of thirty, desperately clinging to a fast-vanishing beauty, all she had of assets.

"He won't talk, eh?"

She shook her head.

"You know you told me not to make him suspicious by asking him direct questions."

"Quite right, quite right. But we have waited long enough—too long, in fact. Next time he comes, drop one of these tablets in his drink. Make it strong to disguise the taste. If he doesn't chatter in twenty minutes, give him the other tablet—crush 'em into powder first. Good night." He gave her a small envelope in which were two small white tablets. She received them rather frightenedly.

"Suppose they poison him?"

"They won't." He bent his gaze upon her. "Now, don't forget that—those tablets won't poison a man."

She looked away, unable to meet his eyes.

"Are you sure he knows something you want to find out? Won't you give me an idea what it is?"

The man rose from the chair.

"Look here, my girl, all you have to do is to tell me—and no one else, mind—just what Ram Das says to you outside the usual foolery. You are to fill him up with the notion that you think him a great man and a keeper of secrets. This you have been told to do. We are saving you from, er——trouble—in return. But, for your own sake, don't betray us."

"Oh, I won't," she spoke sulkily.

"Very well, then. Good night once more."

He left the room, and the servant piloted him to the gate. Then, though the night was sweltering, he continued to walk, making several other visits of similar import, leaving similar tablets for the undoing of other native gentlemen. When he left the last place of call, he consulted a tiny notebook, running a finger down a list of a dozen names, from Ram Das, who visited number twelve Marquis Lane, to one Murro Mukergee, whose pleasures were taken at a small house within a stone's throw of the Chowringee Bazaar.

"It's taken me nearly three years to run down that dozen," he murmured. "To make a break would be dangerous. The women were the only bait. Now we'll see."

And, wet through with sweat and dead tired, he went by roundabout ways to his house.

But the tablets failed to loosen any incriminating talk from the cunning souls of the native gentlemen. True, they brought a sort of flowery eloquence to their tongues, but it was all of an amorous nature. At least, the twelve women said so; and Musgrave, the man in the white suit who had left the tablets with them, felt fairly sure they would not dare to lie to him. It seemed, then, that the lanes of apparent information had all run into a *cul de sac*, while the need for truth increased.

The clouds were gathering all over India, sensed in a hundred different ways by those whose business it was to keep the skies clear. Indeed, Musgrave and his kind knew that British rule was traveling blindly along the edge of a precipice—that an annihilating fall was imminent unless the conspiracy could be crushed. And, to stir the people, the heads of the uprising were using the old excuse for revolution: the demand for self-government, which had grown from a whisper to a growl.

Of course, these leaders knew quite well that England would be only too glad to let the country rule itself, if it were able. But England knew—and the leaders of the rising knew—that her withdrawal only meant opening the door to certain others, to the eventual slavery of the common people. Yet the cry had been fanned by fools and idealists in both England and America, whose ignorance was equal to their enthusiasm, and whose disregard of the lessons of history was tantamount to their disregard of logic.

For years gold had been hoarded by the ton by the inner circle of a mysterious secret order, who were the real heads of the conspiracy; while, cunningly screening herself under the "self-government" notion, Germany was acting—pretending that her sole idea was to assist the natives in their struggle. And the majority believed, so cleverly had her propaganda been spread—although it seemed strange that any one could believe her clumsy statement that she would withdraw, once the British were driven out, and leave India to her own devices.

It is hardly necessary to state that Germany had no such intention. And meanwhile, working day and night, Musgrave and the men under him sought the heads of the conspiracy in a hundred different cities, convinced that the supreme head was in Calcutta. Of course, the cities could have been filled with soldiers and every native of any consequence arrested—thousands of them—but the English had never worked that way.

Quietly, with a leniency and kindness that Germany considered as weakness, the British had sought to lead rather than to drive. And all the time they knew that "self-government" meant a return to the barbarous cruelties of the past, with the added horror of Germany's system.

WITHIN a little more than half a mile of the Great Eastern Hotel is a warren, or rather a labyrinth of narrow streets, where the native houses are so crowded that they appear to have been squeezed together until all the fresh air went out of them during the process, leaving a stale, mixed odor of indescribable things. There are no street-lights there, and any one visiting the district at night is plunged at once into all the chances and nastinesses of the Middle Ages.

At the corner of the narrowest of these streets is a grimy native eating-place; at the opposite corner, six feet away, is another, with the added sign in English that dinner may be had, eight courses, for six annas—this to lure the stray sailor. As you go along, this street of queer places narrows slightly, impossible though it seems, until it ends, thirty yards from the eating-houses, in a house that blocks further progress. This house is ostensibly an opium-smoking den, but it harbors other possibilities.

Taking it altogether, this street is the most evil in the world, not excepting that unholy lane almost opposite the island of the many thousand devils in Canton.

While any night for many years would have served for this introduction, we will take a night shortly after the failure of Musgrave's tablets: a hot, steamy night at about eleven o'clock, when Europeans were questing coolness but failing to find it. Apparently indifferent to the heat, a white man walked rapidly and nervously toward the narrow street just described. He walked as one who knew his way and was very much at home, taking no notice of any one or anything.

He passed the eating-houses and went on until the opium-den barred his further progress. He gave a peculiar knock on the door. It opened immediately and closed as he hurried into the house. A large oil lamp showed him to be unshaven and dressed in a not very clean white duck suit, with shoes that needed pipeclay. From behind a partition one of the worst half-breeds in the world—low-caste Indian native and Chinese coolie—came out and nodded familiarly, his cruel eyes closely set in a face that had never known a decent thought, with a mouth that showed homicide, not as a tendency but as a habit.

But the white man was not at all impressed by the villainous appearance of the other. He only spoke one word, "*guldi*"—hurry up—and went on into the house, pushing through curtains until he came to a bunk, partitioned off from the others, where, after removing his coat, hat and shoes, he lay down. At once a boy arrived with opium-smoking paraphernalia, and the man, trembling with nervousness, sucked the smoke into his lungs gratefully.

As he relaxed, one might have seen that he was an old man, but that would have been all the clue to his remarkable life—and no clue at all to the fact that he knew India as no other white man had ever known it; knew the natives better than they knew themselves. Nor could you have told from his face—and the half-breed at the door of the den would have never dreamed of telling you—that he had lived among the warrens of Calcutta, unknown to the police, for more than forty years.

Pill after pill the boy prepared, the white man smoking greedily until finally he lay back content. It was not a nice place, what with the heat, the foul air and the other customers snoring and stinking in what amounted to an unpleasant chorus; but the old Englishman had grown to like it better than any other place in the world. How he lived and where he got his money no one knew or inquired. For years he had patronized the opium-den nightly, and prior to that another place of the same type.

But the most interesting questions—where he had come from, why he had buried himself among the natives, who he really was, and what he had done during all the years when not under the influence of opium—all this was a mystery. Again, he had lived among the natives so long that they hardly looked upon him as an Englishman. No other white man, for example, could have obtained admission to the den; and, if one had happened in there, the half-breed would have been the cause—lured there to be murdered and robbed.

Natives of very high degree smoked there nightly, but none questioned the old Englishman. It was as safe for him to come and go as it was for them, perhaps more so. But description fails when trying to tell of one of the most interesting men in the world.

He appeared to sleep, and the boy, knowing his ways, left him. Presently he would shout for another pill. Later on this would be repeated, until at last he would be satisfied. He had smoked for so many years that an amount which would have sent the ordinary man into dreams hardly affected him. But, when the boy had gone, he acted very strangely. Instead of lying in the bunk to fully enjoy the drug, he cautiously got up and tip toed to another partition, where he listened to a low-voiced talk between four natives.

It was not the first night he had interested himself in this talk, but, even if the natives had known he was listening, they would have only thought that his action was an effect of the drug—that he did not understand the import of what they were saying. They little knew that, many years before, this apparent wreck, this poor old bit of human flotsam, had constituted himself the guardian of British rule in India, that he had built up the most wonderful system of news-getting, that nothing of importance occurred that he did not hear of immediately, that, in short, he sat like a spider in a huge web, his filaments stretching to every corner of the country, responsive to every tremor, to every movement.

As he listened, he nodded. Then he crept back to his bunk.

"Tomorrow morning," he thought, "I will have the first talk with an Englishman that I have had for over forty years. It will seem queer—especially the bull-headedness I will have to overcome before that fool Musgrave will believe me."

Then he shouted for more opium.

Morning came, and the half-breed noticed, but thought nothing of it, that the old Englishman left the den rather earlier than usual. A little later Sir Richard Musgrave, who was breakfasting alone, was surprized to hear that a *sahib* wished to see him on business of importance. His first idea was to send word that he was busy, but his rather more than five years in the country had taught him one thing, and that was the natives' intuitive judgment of character. Not that Sir Richard's bearer knew the old Englishman—the latter had taken care of that—but he had been greatly impressed by his manner, and he carried that impression in to his master. Accordingly, Sir Richard said that he would see the *sahib.*

He looked very different from the man who had left the opium-den some little time previously. In his brown silk suit, with his rather stern, clean-shaven face, he might have been a naval officer of high rank in mufti. Sir Richard received him in kind.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Sinclair. Oh, yes—had breakfast yet?"

The *kitmatgar* at that moment brought in a dish, and Sinclair looked at it.

"*Bismallah, bummolo mutchi.* Had I had breakfast, Sir Richard, I couldn't resist. And I haven't. How did you get 'em?"

His manner was that of an equal, if not a superior.

"One of the pilots brought them up, on a quick steamer. Jolly good, aren't they?"

"Best fish in the world," agreed Sinclair. "Claret, please. At my time of life I find it the best drink for breakfast."

"Yes, I know many men who say the same. Personally, I prefer whisky. By the way, been long out here?"

Sinclair smiled.

"What I have to tell you must be told when we're alone. Be careful not to ask leading questions when your servant returns. I have been in India for more than forty years, without a day's leave."

He spoke now as to an inferior, and Sir Richard Musgrave almost gaped.

"The devil," he muttered, "and what have you to tell me?"

"A lot of things—everything, in fact. First, though, that list of twelve natives was arranged for you. Fixed to put you off the track. None of that dozen are of any importance at all. I doubt if cocain would make a native talk, as it doesn't even affect all white men that way. But, even so, they knew it was going to be put in their drink. No, Sir Richard, important natives do not visit any of the white women that you know about."

There was a trace of contempt in his voice as he exposed Musgrave's pet scheme, but the servant's entrance cut off any reply. When the *kitmatgar* left again, Sir Richard permitted himself a sarcasm—the first and last he ever permitted himself in Sinclair's presence.

"SINCE you're so well informed, perhaps you can tell me—er—well—perhaps you know the entrance to this Underground Calcutta we hear about?"

He had about as much expectation of getting an affirmative reply as he had of receiving a demonstration of the fourth dimension His astonishment was amusing when Sinclair said quietly, but testily—

"Of course I know it, and, naturally, it's right under your nose."

"What?"

"Tut, tut—servant's coming. Wait. More claret, please."

And Sinclair resolutely refused to talk further during breakfast.

Now, Sir Richard Musgrave, as became his position, had very definite ideas concerning spying, and he believed he had safeguarded himself against every possibility of being overheard. So, when he suggested to Sinclair—of whom he was beginning to stand in some awe in spite of his efforts not to—that their conference should take place in his private office, he was really shocked when the old man replied:

"No, thanks. You see, what I have to tell you must go no further than yourself, for the present."

"But, man, what do you mean. My office is private. The walls are examined daily for wires, and the punka coolie is two rooms away, with a trusted white sentry in between."

"So I understand. Now, don't go and give it away by having it moved; just be careful. But—on the punka in your office, with the wire along the pulling-rope, is a very ingenious microphone machine. The rank of your punka coolie would surprize you, if you knew it. But don't let him know you're on to him until I give the word for the general arrest. No, sir, our talk will take place out on the race-track—funny place at this time of day, but I want it so, and we won't be heard."

Sir Richard was genuinely overcome.

"How on earth, or under the earth, do you get all this information? And who sent you here—the viceroy?"

The old man laughed.

"Call your carriage—we're going out to look at the track. You have a horse, bay Waler, entered for next week's races, you know."

"Good lord, and how much have I in the bank?" laughed Sir Richard.

"Seven hundred and thirty-two rupees, four annas, in Calcutta," replied Sinclair laconically.

"Great Scotland Yard!" And Sir Richard Musgrave, too astounded to collect himself for another question—he knew the bank officials would never tell a stranger what his balance was, and he was a bit ashamed of its lowness—ordered his carriage.

On the way out both men talked horse and smoked, for the benefit of the driver. And then, as if the man wished to further astonish him, Musgrave noticed that in some subtle way Sinclair's face had taken on that unmistakable something which indicates the "horsey" man the world over. Even in the way he held the cigar in his mouth, the look in his eyes, the drooping lids—all went to make him look like a successful trainer and breeder, and for such the quick-witted natives took him, the visit being reported to native headquarters as having only to do with the coming races.

So no suspicion was aroused in the native mind when Sinclair and Musgrave walked alone under the trees surrounding the track—Musgrave listening as if to a page from some living but unbelievable story, as Sinclair talked.

"You asked me who sent me. To answer that, I must ask you to go back several years. Forty-seven years ago, on my twenty-first birthday, I came to Calcutta to join what they called the secret service—a service less efficient, even, than that of today."

Musgrave winced, but could say nothing.

"There were the usual things to do, and there was the perennial tale about Underground Calcutta and the native system of telegraphy—both of which were prizes sought by the ambitious secret service man, although his usual work was much more prosaic. I wasn't called Sinclair in those days, but that is a detail. After I began to get around I became rather friendly with a Goanese we had working for us, a chap with one eye, with the very Goanese name of Manuel Lopez.

"This chap firmly believed in Underground Calcutta and said it was a regular town, an idea with which I did not agree. He used to disappear for weeks at a time, and so got the reputation of being a periodical drunk. This he strenuously denied, but in those days it didn't matter very much, anyhow. Then one morning early a native brought me a *chit* from this Lopez, saying he was dying in a little house owned by a Portuguese across the river at Howrah and asking me to go to him.

"Of course, I went, arriving just as the priest had finished giving him absolution. He was near the end, having been stabbed in about forty places, but he could speak, and he sent everybody out of the room but myself. He grew weaker rapidly, and I had to put my ear to his mouth to hear what he was trying to say.

"Now, I don't think a dying man, after the priest has done with him, will indulge in lying to amuse himself, not even if he is a Goanese; and, when Lopez told me that he had found the entrance to Underground Calcutta, I believed him. He gave me directions which led to a house with a green door, which he said he had reached the night before—being attacked and stabbed by two natives who found him there.

"The house, he said, was over on this side of the river; so I naturally asked him how he got to Howrah after being stabbed. This he did not know, having lost consciousness, recovering it again on the doorstep of his Portuguese friend in Howrah. He was trying to tell me something else when he died.

"Of course, I lost no time telling all this to the chief, but he laughed at me, claiming that Lopez had been cut up in some row over a woman. And I'll admit that it did sound fishy—the tale about being stabbed in Calcutta and recovering his senses in Howrah, four miles away. But, again, what reason would a dying man have for lying? However, I had a way of finding out—by following the directions given me by Lopez, although, of course, the entrance to Underground Calcutta might have been changed to another house, one without a green door.

"Now, you will find it difficult to believe what I am going to tell you. That is, you will at present—later on, certain things about to happen will strengthen your credulity. Because half a dozen Englishmen have died—from natural causes, in bed—during the past thirty-five years, and every one of them had been told where the entrance to Underground Calcutta was, and, what is more, they knew they had been told the truth!"

"Englishmen!" ejaculated the astounded Musgrave. "What sort of Englishmen?"

"Our sort—your sort. One was head of the secret service; the others were higher in authority."

"But it's incredible. It's inconceivable that such men should know this and not report it. And I know there is no record." Musgrave looked at Sinclair curiously. "Why did they say nothing?"

"Because they forgot all about it."

Musgrave laughed.

"But this is absurd. Forgive me, but such a tale is preposterous."

"Probably—to a man who does not know India, or the native. There are men who have a smattering of knowledge about the country, but none who know what I do. Yet, you know yourself that the men who know India best are the first to believe what others would call nonsense."

"That is very true," replied Musgrave gravely. "And I think I see your drift—they were made to forget?"

"EXACTLY. To continue my story: while I was not such an adept at making a native of myself in those days as I am today—I have been to Mecca and can enter any temple in India without rousing the slightest suspicion—I was pretty good at disguising myself. So I made up as a low-caste native—a *topak*, to be exact, because I thought the lowest would be asked the fewest questions—and went to find the green door. Lopez had told the truth, and I found it.

"There I was lucky. I found a native waiting for somebody just outside the door, and I soon saw he was deaf and dumb. A hundred yards away I had a *gharri*, with another Englishman disguised as a native driving it. I grabbed the deaf-and-dumb native, got him into the *gharri* and sent him away where he could do no harm. Then I squatted down outside the green door and waited."

"Lord," breathed Musgrave, "that was a pretty nervy thing to do."

"Well, the fact of his being deaf and dumb helped me. Although I was a bit afraid there might be some sort of sign system. But there wasn't, except a kick when they wanted something done—a kick and a pointed finger."

"Who were 'they'?"

"Coming to that, and, while I'm about it, I may as well tell you that all servants, or rather slaves, connected with Underground Calcutta are deaf and dumb."

"What a curious coincidence," remarked Musgrave thoughtfully.

"Hardly," replied Sinclair dryly. "Better word would be 'operation.' "

"You mean?"

"Yes, they make the poor devils deaf and dumb—want 'em as harmless as possible. And they don't use an anesthetic, either. I've heard them do it." He shuddered at a past memory.

"The devils," growled Musgrave and pulled out his cigar case. "Have another—that one's about done."

Sinclair lit the cheroot.

"Yes, I waited there until a big, fat babu came along and kicked me to my feet. It was pretty hard to stand that, but I managed. And then the babu knocked on the green gate with his umbrella, and we were admitted. Now, there is no need to go into details about the place at this time. In less than a week you'll be in charge, and able to do your own surveying."

Musgrave seized his arm.

"In less than a week—I'll be in charge of Underground Calcutta?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, and have enough gold to cart away to sink the British navy, or near it. Then there are a few diamonds, several deceased rajah's treasures. Man, they've been saving up for nearly a century to get enough money to beat us. The funny part is that they trust Germany to play square. That is, they seem to, but there are times when I doubt it—when I think they have Germany double-crossed. Yet, for the life of me, I can not see how they expect to do it. However, that's not our funeral.

"Well, I messed about underground, unsuspected and going pretty much where I wanted to, for about a week, and then something happened."

Sinclair paused, staring straight ahead, as if he were seeing faces that Musgrave could not see. He sighed.

"I have never spoken of this to another man, and I will never speak of it again. It is necessary that I tell you, but you will know how to take it." He paused again, and Musgrave waited in silence. "You know," Sinclair went on, "in those days there were quite a number of 'Mutiny women' still living. They were dying off rather fast, because it wasn't healthy underground—although I'll do the natives justice to say they did all they could to make the women comfortable. They dared not liberate them, of course, but they treated them well.

"There is nothing to be gained by mentioning names, but I manged to tell one lady that I was a secret service man. She had a daughter, a beautiful girl of about twenty-six, and when the mother understood all about me—the long confienment had affected her brain somewhat—she was all on fire for me to get the girl out. She didn't care about herself—she was not far from her end, she said—but Lucy must be saved from this living death, and, what was worse, from a big babu who had taken a fancy to her.

"I was willing, more than willing, because—" Sinclair's voice grew husky—"from the moment I first saw Lucy she was the one woman in all the world for me, and she very soon admitted that I was the only man she had ever cared about. It was strange, too, because, disguised as a sweeper, I was hardly a handsome-looking sample of an Englishman. But such things don't go by appearances, it seems.

"But the job was a tremendous one. I have not told you about all the precautions they took when anybody went in or out. The babu whose servant I was supposed to be had to answer twenty questions before they let him in, and there were a dozen guarded doors to pass. I had remembered the way we had come in, but I had a sneaking idea that no one was allowed to go out the same way, and it turned out that I was right.

"Now, here comes a curious thing, which I don't expect you to believe, and which I admit I laughed at when I first heard it. It was told to me by Lucy's mother, and please remember that I am quoting her when I am telling it to you. She told me that for thousands of years a few of the leaders of India, the highest priests and the like, had carefully cultivated a sort of slug, a thing somewhat like those large snails you see at home after rain. The strange thing about these slugs was that they multiplied as the amebæ do—that is, by fission: instead of laying eggs, or anything like that, one of the slugs—they were neuter, of course—split into two, and there were two slugs where a few minutes previously there was only one.

"Thus, in a sense, they were immortal, like the amebæ. But you must remember that any slug is a very complicated animal compared to an amebæ, and that is one reason I doubted the story when the lady told it to me. For instance, they have a relatively involved nervous structure. Looked at in another way: if a slug split into two, and so on for a few generations, you have a number of individuals who are in reality just one individual. I may say that I have studied a great deal during the past thirty years, and, while the thing is new, I don't think it is impossible.

"Well, these slugs were carefully kept in gold boxes, and they were so closely related nervously that if you took six of them and separated them, putting three into each box, they imitated each other's movements. For instance, if you arranged the three in one box into the shape of a triangle, the three in the other box would slowly arrange themselves into a similar figure. Does that seem impossible to you?"

"Why, I don't know much about such things," replied Musgrave, "but I see no reason why it should not be so. Nature is forever surprizing us, you know."

"Yes; and in this case man had worked with nature for several thousand years. Well, then, if you could make a triangle, and the other slugs would imitate it, there is no reason why you could not make a number of other figures, and have them imitate them, is there?"

"None at all."

"So, and do you see the significance of the thing?"

"Can not say I do." Musgrave was wondering why his companion should have suddenly started a lecture on natural history.

"Well," Sinclair continued, "you might have, say, twenty figures, each meaning a letter—a code, couldn't you? You see, distance made no difference to the slugs, the second three would imitate the triangle made by the first either in the next room or a thousand miles away."

"Of course."

"See any relation between my story and the mysterious Indian telegraph which has puzzled us so long?"

"The devil," blurted Musgrave, "but the thing is impossible, of course."

"Well, a moment ago you said it wasn't. However, as I said, I won't insist. But think it over."

"Hold on—" Musgrave was interested—"tell me more."

"Not now—we have more important matters to discuss. But first I must finish my tale. I will tell you, though, that the slugs were first cultivated by a man who died a thousand years before the first Buddha was born.

"I WILL not take up your time with the hundreds of difficulties I had to overcome before I got Lucy away from the place. But, before we got away, her mother managed to get hold of two of the slug boxes, each with three slugs in it, so she could talk to Lucy when she could no longer see her, using a code they had agreed upon. As I didn't believe the thing then, I protested about being bothered with the box, and I was afraid that the man at the head of Underground Calcutta would be all the keener to get Lucy back when he knew she had one of the confounded things. And I was right.

"To be brief, there were certain of the highest Government officials in Calcutta the day I got Lucy away, and, when she told my chief her tale, he hurried us to them. I can see the picture yet. We sat around a table, myself as a dirty sweeper among those uniforms. Lucy had the gold box in her hand, and was telling about it, when something possessed me to make a sketch of us all, putting the names under the figures of the men and the word 'sweetheart' under Lucy's.

"I made a good job of her face, but the others would hardly have been flattered. Then I put the sketch in my pocket, and at that moment a tremendous fuss started. For all of a sudden the high-caste native who was king in Underground Calcutta was standing by the table. He must have hypnotized the sentries.

"The governor-general got red in the face, and only Lucy's presence prevented him from swearing. She was very pale, and frightened. But the native gave us no time to talk. He said something, and then he asked us—it was really a command—to look carefully at something he had for us. Then he flashed something that looked like a great diamond, and, too late, I knew he had us.

"You have no idea how far those chaps have carried hypnotism. It's quite a trick, you know, to hypnotize a crowd like we were, although, of course, we were off our guard. But he had us. Oh, he had us. And he actually told me that he was sorry for me, but that I would not suffer. Then he raised his voice and addressed us all:

" 'You will forget all that has happened today and never remember it again. You will forget what this young man has told you, and you will forget you ever saw him. You—' he turned to me—'will forget you ever saw this lady (which is merciful) and you will forget all about the place you have just come from. You,' he spoke to Lucy, 'will forget this man ever spoke to you. Give me the box and come with me. The rest of you will disperse.'

"It was many years before I remembered that speech of his, for the next thing I knew I was standing by the chief's desk in his office, with him saying he had never seen me in his life. Of course, he could have looked up the records, but he didn't remember me. You will see, if you will think a moment, that when the native gave us that order, under hypnosis, it affected us all differently. The chief did not know me at all, having been ordered to forget me, and I did not trouble to have anybody in the office identify me.

"I just left, and I suppose I was written down as a deserter. I could remember Manuel telling me about the house with a green door, after that was a blank. But back of my mind something seemed to be calling me—something that gave me pain. And then I found the sketch in my pocket. If I had never made that sketch, I would not be talking to you today. I felt there was a mystery somewhere, and I knew that sketch held the clue to it.

"I had some money, and I made several lucky deals in a business way; and then I settled down to study the native, to puzzle out the meaning of the sketch and to gradually become the unofficial guardian of British rule in India.

"Memory came to me gradually. I used to concentrate myself on the sketch, fighting against the mental inhibition impressed upon me by the hypnosis. Then, at the end of five years, it came—came full memory of all that had happened. I nearly went mad, and, but for a certain soothing drug, which I still use, I would have gone mad. It doesn't matter how I found it out, but I learned that Lucy and her mother were both dead; Lucy by her own hand, to escape the attentions of the babu I told you of. And that is my story."

"My good lord!" breathed Musgrave.

"You believe me?"

"I can not help it, except about those snails."

"Well, I told you that that did not matter."

"All right. And you have more to tell, I judge, since you told me the twelve natives whom I thought were ringleaders were only decoys, as it were?"

"I have. By the way, you must have seen men hypnotized by a bright flash of light, since you were not surprized by that part of my tale."

"I have," replied Musgrave wryly.

"So. And now I don't need to tell you that India is on the verge of the greatest upheaval she has ever known—an upheaval in which, if not guarded, the British Raj will go down to defeat?"

"Yes, I know," Musgrave spoke wearily. "I have done all I can, and so have my men. I can do no more now but wait till they start."

"It will be too late then," said Sinclair quietly.

"But what can I do, man; I'm at my wits' end. We have soldiers, of course, but we don't know where to begin. I thought those twelve were ringleaders, but now I see they are not. For God's sake, as you're an Englishman, help us."

For so self-contained a man, his words and way of speaking did indeed show him at his wits' end, and Sinclair laid a hand on his shoulder soothingly.

"Don't worry; I have them."

"You?" Musgrave's tone was dubious.

"Well, if you won't trust me, just what will you do?"

"I didn't say I wouldn't trust you."

They had walked to the end of the line of shade trees, and now they turned back.

"In my pocket," said Sinclair, "is a list of every native who must be arrested. Against certain names is a cross—that means death. They are scattered about every city in

India, but my papers will show you where to find them. Then there are thousands of Germans disguised as natives—these must die."

Musgrave shook his head.

"Can't do it, you know. We may lock 'em up as spies, but Government won't stand for killing—at least, not legal killing."

"What would *they* do?"

"Oh, yes, I know. But we're us, you see."

"Yes, and in a few years Germany will start the biggest war in the history of the earth. Why wait and give them the start?"

Musgrave laughed.

"Never mind that, even if I do agree with you. What do the natives intend?"

"It has been arranged that you and every Englishman of importance in India will be poisoned at dinner next Saturday night—and the German Government knows it, if it did not actually suggest doing it," said Sinclair quietly.

"Go on," Musgrave spoke grimly.

"TODAY is Tuesday. I will not give you my papers here, because your *sais* may be watching us with a pair of binoculars from behind your carriage. You have a room in your office where we can be unseen for a moment—the lavatory. I will hand them to you there. You have only to follow directions. You will see that I have arranged for everything to begin at eight-thirty, Saturday night. Telegraph your orders in a code you can be sure is not known to the other side. You can have everything ready?"

"Yes."

"Good, but have it distinctly understood—not an overt move before Saturday."

"I'll see to it."

"You are quite sure that my orders are worth following—sure I have the power to be right in this?"

"Unless I believe you and do as you say, I am helpless." Musgrave's voice broke. "And you don't seem to realize how convincing you are."

"Very well, and at eight-thirty Saturday night I will meet you, as the papers tell, at the entrance to Underground Calcutta."

"You will do what?" gasped Musgrave.

"Meet you at the hiding-place of the conspirators' heads—Underground Calcutta."

"But where is it, you wizard?"

"Where do you think?"

"No notion at all."

"You have been here for five years and two months, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, where do you think those very cunning men at the head of this conspiracy moved the entrance to—five years ago?"

"I tell you I have no idea."

"Then I'll tell you. The entrance to Underground Calcutta is in the compound of your own house in Chworingee Road, in your servants' *godown.*"

Musgrave spluttered feebly.

"Now, on Saturady night you will say you are dining out. You will find similar arrangements made to save the other men to be poisoned. Consequently, your servants will be talking about the coming débâcle in the *godown.* Take about twenty trusty, powerful non-commissioned officers and two officers; disguise them as natives, and at eight-thirty, when, as you will see by my papers, the viceroy, for you, will order things started, go to the *godown.* Smash every man there—better kill them—except one man who will be squatting in the north-east corner.

"Don't touch that native, because it will be me. After that, I will lead you to where the ringleaders, the supreme council for India, will be in session. That is all, but be sure to have my directions, as written on my papers, followed."

"I will, but how can your country reward you? I can not think of a sufficient honor."

Sinclair smiled.

"In the first place, while I am giving directions, the orders will go out from you. Yours will be the honor. I want you to promise not to mention my name. You will get all the credit."

"But," Musgrave stammered, "it's not fair. What have I done?"

"You will have exercised more common sense than most men in your position would have done—you have enough sense to believe a man who is telling the truth, and you have sufficient courage to take upon yourself the responsibility of that belief."

"But I have no other course," said Musgrave fairly. "And, besides, you have put proofs of your story in your directions."

"All the same, the credit is yours. You will be the next viceroy, and you deserve to be. And now to your office."

The next few days were one whirl of activity for Musgrave. As Sinclair had said, not one in a hundred men in his position would have acted on the word of a stranger; but Musgrave was the one man—his judgment of men amounted to genius, and while there were proofs galore among Sinclair's papers and lists of those to be arrested, yet the fact of Musgrave acting so promptly and efficiently entitled him to at least more credit than he thought of looking for. And meanwhile the yeast of conspiracy was working, until the usual frothy signs began to appear on the surface.

The native mind acts strangely, but along known lines, and bhang-filled men insulting white women in their own peculiar manner is as sure a first sign of coming trouble as a dark cloud is of an approaching rain. Then came the great difficulty with which the heads of the conspiracy had to contend—that difficulty, by the way, which precludes the possibility of India ever becoming a self-governing country: religious fights and rioting.

Over the mass of the people just enough of the intended revolution had been breathed to throw them into the necessary state of unrest, prior to loosening them to an orgy of blood and lust. And this, as ever, reacted in desecration of sacred places. For there are few things a Mohammedan enjoys more than to scatter filth in a Hindu temple, and the Hundu delights to reciprocate in kind. Religious belief is too deeply woven into the warp of their souls for them to be able to omit these indecent, but apparently charming, details.

Consequently, British soldiers were set the task that was beyond the heads of the conspiracy—keeping Mohammedans and Hindus from killing one another until these same heads struck the hour when their masses should kill every English man and woman in India. Only, on this occasion, thanks to an old gone-native Englishman and a very efficient secret service head, there was more than method in what the natives as usual looked upon as British madness.

At the end of 1895 and the beginning of 1896 there was actually staged a "try out" of the great conspiracy, subdued because it was never intended that it should go further than rioting, although certain big Mohammedans actually went to the British Government telegraph office to telegraph to the Sultan of Turkey, as the somewhat disputed head of the faith, for assistance against the British!

So the hours passed with increasing restlessness and alarm; the mob certain something big was breaking, but not sure what. And all over India Englishmen worked and worked, as they have so long worked, that the wolves should be balked of their supper, and that decent blood should not again become a trampled sacrifice to things unclean.

And yet, without a spoken word, by Friday morning all but the infants and the insane knew that the British Raj was tottering. Old men told of the many times they had known it to totter and yet regain its feet because the star of the Raj had not set, but now they more than hinted that this time the Raj would fall.

And, being ignorant, they were glad, believing, with the illogical folly of mouthy political reformers, that afterward would be a time of plenty for all, when no man would have to work; when, in some wonderful way, food would be had for the asking. Believing this, they were happy in the further belief that the best Government they could get was dying.

And meanwhile Tommy Atkins laughed at the rumors, while sincerely hoping there would be a scrap.

AND at eight o'clock on that fateful Saturday Sir Richard Musgrave, having given word that he was dining out, tired but undisturbed, laughed as cheerfully as if preparing private theatricals as he supervised in a secluded part of Fort William the turning of certain spick-and-span sergeants into most disreputable natives, whose lurid oaths, addressed to their unusual costumes, were a linguistic education both diverting and illuminating.

Following a few grotesque movements, supposedly imitative of highly bred ladies daintily lifting a skirt from the contaminating dust—the native linen lower garment making a most immodest skirt—these quite-contented samples of the backbone of the British army drifted out past speechless but contorted sentries to mingle with the seething, chattering masses on the streets. Their unaccustomed bare feet caused them a degree of concern which, had it been day, would have shaken the confidence of their disguises very seriously.

However, as it was not light, and as they obeyed orders and forgot for the evening their pet delusion that they could talk Hindustani with fluency and ease, confining their remarks to semi-suppressed but poignant references to tender toes, they made their ways, undetected, by various routes to the vicinity of Musgrave's garden gate. About there they squatted and pretended to chew betel-nut—not because they had been told to do so, but because their artistic souls called upon them—as they explained it—"to be the 'ole bleedin' 'og, or nothin'."

It was only after all was over that the discovery was made that most of these supposed Mohammedans bore upon their bare and but lightly-tinted arms tattooed ladies, whose microscopical clothing was distinctly European and whose anatomical peculiarities were forced upon the vision in an inverse ratio to that advocated by ethical teachers. A detail which these temporary followers of the prophet would have explained, no doubt, without any difficulty, if some curious native had expressed his interest.

"For the Lord's sake, slouch," whispered a half-strangled captain, when his extraordinary platoon came to attention upon his arrival. "Stick your stomachs out, and your chests in," he continued feebly, as the well-drilled shoulders, apparently trying to dislocate themselves, started a convulsive movement up and down muscular bodies that looked like a series of indelicate parodies of "Little Egypt."

From among the heavy shadows there appeared another native. This one was evidently a babu, because, in addition to rather more linen about his person than worn by the lower classes, his bare feet were thrust into squeaky, elastic-sided boots. He also wore a beard, and his pride in his appearance was manifested by his mincing gait—that is, it looked that way until he was heard saying things about the shoes which corrected that impression.

He approached the captain, and made some sign of identification. But the captain seemed to be in pain. Indeed, he acted like a man who, suffering from cholera, was making a brave effort to keep on his feet. The bearded babu was first puzzled and then alarmed. What if, after all, Sinclair had made a mistake in the day, and all Europeans in authority had been poisoned this Friday night, instead of Saturday.

He walked toward the captain, who feebly waved him away; and then, despite the order concerning quietness, he became aware of an indescribable noise among the weird-looking crowd of natives. He turned upon them with annoyance, and the queer noise increased. What is more, several of them, unable to contain themselves, lay down on the road and appeared to have fits.

"What the devil's the matter, Simmons?" he demanded of the captain.

But the other could only point with a shaky finger, and Musgrave, for it was he, looked down in the half light and saw his sock suspenders waving about his bare legs. Hastily he removed them—surely, the suspenders couldn't have caused all this commotion—and sought a pocket to put them in. And then he knew. Dressing hurriedly, and unused to native costume, he had—but the anguish of the captain and his men is sufficient explanation.

Behind a convenient tree the head of the secret service adjusted himself, returning with desperate dignity, by which time the captain had managed to prod his men into a semblance of composure.

But it was nearly half-past eight, and the fate of an empire hung upon the next hour and what was done in it. The happy hilarity dropped from the disguised Englishmen as they moved stealthily toward the servants' *godown*. Every man had a heavy service revolver under his left arm, but, for immediate use, the brawny fist of each right hand was encased in brass knuckles.

There was a babel in the *godown*, across the noise of which the occasional shriek of some night-bird sounded weirdly. At that hour the smoke and smell of cooking-fires was at its heaviest, the suggestion of sleepy peace which the familiar odor aroused contrasting painfully with the work in hand. For that work was not to Musgrave's liking—the attack on the servants, that is. They had served him faithfully and well, and they were only the tools of the chief conspirators.

But all over India the like was happening, or would be in a few minutes. Servants who had served their English masters for, in some cases, more than twenty years were sworn to poison these same masters. Many, indeed most, of these servants loved the men they served. But they were putting this aside, giving up place and risking their lives, for what? None of them could have definitely told. In a vague way they expected better things, while unable to imagine anything better than the excellent situations and astonishingly good pay which was theirs.

But it is always thus. Let a mouthy word-misuser shout platitudes and distorted truisms at a crowd, and that crowd is his. For crowds do not think. When men really learn to think the need of it will be past. And Musgrave, knowing all this, loathed his present job. Later on in the evening there would be something to do that would be to his taste. There was no doubt in his mind about this, because in countless ways Sinclair had been proven. So wonderfully had the old man's papers illuminated the darkness that the viceroy, believing Musgrave to be their author, had already cabled to England, advising the Office that Musgrave had saved India and asking for unlimited honors for him.

"Well?" The captain's voice was testy. "Are you all ready?"

Musgrave was procrastinating like a scared boy in a dentist chair.

"What's the matter, old man—aren't you well?" the captain whispered.

"Go ahead," Musgrave spoke fiercely, "but be sure you protect the native over in that northeast corner."

"Every man knows about that," drawled the captain, a young man with no respect for anything but the flag—and perhaps a certain field marshal.

"In with you, then, and get it over with," Musgrave gave back.

Then, as they had been ordered, still lifting their feet with care, the soldiers silently rushed the *godown*. The surprize was complete, and the unrestrained brass knuckles did awful work, deadly work.

WHATEVER happened in that *godown* happened quietly, and immediately afterward a fatigue party with a large auto truck arrived as per schedule. But by that time Musgrave was talking eagerly to a man who looked so like a native that the staring captain thought he was one.

"Everything's all right—" Musgrave panted a little—"all over the country. Now, if we can get the ——"

"The 'Inner Twelve' they call themselves," smiled the unmoved Sinclair, "which, without wishing to be offensive, was why they arranged that 'outer twelve' and conferred upon them very lovable dispositions."

"That's all right," Musgrave smiled back. "The way things are going, I can stand that now. But aren't we wasting time?"

"Not time yet," replied Sinclair. "I'm waiting for a signal."

"For a signal?" Musgrave was startled.

"Well," drawled Sinclair, "you don't for a moment imagine that I could lead you into Underground Calcutta unless I had a confederate or two, do you?"

"I see," agreed Musgrave.

"And, by the way, I have arranged a short list of names which you will get the Government to pension—poor devils," Sinclair went on.

"Certainly—who are they?"

"The deaf-and-dumb servants of the place down there," Sinclair pointed to the mud floor of the *godown*. "You see, in the end brutality never pays. The poor slaves who could neither speak nor hear only wanted some one to organize them and take charge. For years these deaf-and-dumb creatures have been paid for their work with kicks. The wheel turns—without their aid I could not have saved India or taken you into the headquarters of the conspiracy. Ah!"

The wall looked like clay, but as a door about four feet wide swung open, Musgrave saw that it was made of heavy steel, colored to look like the surrounding mud.

"I don't need to ask you, perhaps, but you made all arrangements as I suggested?" asked Sinclair rapidly.

"I did."

"All right; then, jamb this door with the jacks and things and follow me with your twenty."

He stepped through the door, and Musgrave followed, breathing rapidly. Perhaps he was more affected than the others who followed him, but the tremendous mystery of the place, with all its painful and sacred associations, weighed upon him so that he went forward to what was to be recorded as the greatest success of his life feeling greatly troubled.

It was quite dark inside, and the eyes of the little deaf-and-dumb slave glittered as he turned to lead. Little did the Englishmen, following so quietly, dream of the wonderful bravery of that poor native, trusting entirely in the word of one white man and risking, if that white man's plans failed, a torture beyond words to describe. But he had done it—in his poor sign language he had managed to explain to other deaf-and-dumb slaves what Sinclair told him. And what a task it must have been.

Neither he nor his fellows could read or write, and there was always the chance that one of them might betray him, or, out of some idea of loyalty, report him before he could tell all of his tale. Yet he had done it. One of the bravest things a man ever did—with the freedom of his fellows his goal.

Down that long flight of steps they walked, Sinclair explaining.

"You see," he whispered, "the place is on the four-hundred-foot level, as it were. It's four hundred feet underground, and they always tunneled a shaft up for an entrance so that they could fill it up if necessary. You'd shiver if you knew how easily this tunnel could collapse."

Musgrave did shiver, the strain of the last few months, culminating in the past week's rush, having brought him to the verge of a complete breakdown. But he kept his feelings to himself, and the procession kept following him. He began to feel that he was walking in an interminable coffin, for the height of the sloping passage was just about six feet, and it was so narrow that if a man swayed ever so little his shoulders rubbed the wall. And the darkness was something he had never experienced—he imagined he could feel it; yet no man stumbled, because the steps were so regularly cut that walking became automatic after the first half dozen or so.

At last the native reached the last step, and he turned and touched Sinclair, who touched Musgrave, who sent the signal to stop rapidly along the line. They were still in the dark, and even the most stolid was beginning to have the feeling that the millions of tons of earth above them might at any moment collapse and bury them. And the heat was intense.

The native seemed puzzled. He was moving his hands across the face of either a wall or a door as if seeking something. Sinclair sensed this because he stood next to the native, and for a moment the chill of failure gripped him. Better than any one else, he realized the awful cunning of the men whom he was there to capture; further, he believed in the native system of telegraphy and knew that the twelve leaders were at that moment somewhere underground near-by, receiving messages that told of the sudden British descent upon the different headquarters of the conspirators all over India and the upsetting of the plan of wholesale poisoning.

He had made his plans with all the skill of which he was capable, and so cleverly had he done this that Musgrave had come to believe he was beyond failure. But Sinclair himself knew better; and now his mind began to go back over his plans, seeking the inevitable loop-hole—that flaw in every plan, which the enemy knows must be and always looks for.

He had been compelled to wait until the deaf-and-dumb native could open the door from the inside—obeying an order, because among the crowd of servants in the *godown* was a man with an important message having to do with local conditions under his control. That man, Sinclair knew, had been taken away in the auto truck. In his place the deaf-and-dumb native had admitted the pretended crowd of natives. Was there any way in which the Inner Twelve could have discovered this—was there any way of their knowing that twenty-three Englishmen had entered Underground Calcutta in the place of one native ward-heeler?

Sinclair cursed himself mentally for troubling himself with foolish questions—for asking himself things he could never answer. If the Inner Twelve did know, the only intimation they would give would be given in the sudden collapse of the tunnel of steps. But what was the matter with the native. Behind him, Sinclair could sense the irritation of Musgrave and the other men. That darkness, like all darkness, would in time make the most positive character as negative as an anemic girl. Besides, the closeness of the walls began to weigh upon the men's spirits.

Yet Sinclair couldn't ask the deaf-and-dumb man a question. He dared not have done so, even if the other could have heard and answered him. But he leaned forward and quietly laid his hand upon one of the native's, noting the careful search the other was making for something. To steady himself, he laid his other hand against the wall and stumbled forward upon the native, who made a little cluck of delight. By the sheerest accident, Sinclair had stumbled upon the secret button, the pressing of which was necessary to open the door.

But it did not open to its full extent, and, when Sinclair slipped through sideways, he found the reason and the reason for the delay while the native looked for the button. A great negro lay dead on the other side of the door, and his body had to be moved before it could be properly opened. It was the negro's job to open the door when the proper knock was given, the button being only used by members of the Inner Twelve, to whom it was only supposed to be known. How the deaf-and-dumb native knew it, Sinclair never knew; but he supposed that, like himself, he had stumbled upon it by accident.

A feeling of wonderful relief went over the squad of Englishmen as they went through the door. Not a word was spoken, and they did not know about the dead negro, whose race Sinclair had discovered by his woolly hair, although he had known of the negro guards for years. Again he had cause to thank the deaf-and-dumb slaves, without whose revolt, even if he had engineered it, he would have been helpless; and he could not help wondering at the blinding effect of cruelty—that the astute thinkers of the Inner Twelve had been so blinded by their brutality to the slaves that the plan of revolt had never been noticed by them.

And even now, after coming so far and after years of study of the information that trickled through to him, his mental map of Underground Calcutta was chaotic, and he was entirely dependent upon the slave.

And now, on level ground, there was a perfect labyrinth of passages—a cunningly constructed maze, wherein a man without the key might wander all his life without finding his way either into Underground Calcutta or out of the maze into daylight. And every few yards was a door behind which was a negro guard—dead; their loyalty had been unquestionable, because the Inner Twelve not only treated them well, but pandered to their individual vices. And now, in place of the negroes, a deaf-and-dumb slave waited by each door to guide the men detailed to come after the first squad of disguised soldiers—the captain of whom waited at the first door in the *godown.*

BUT at last the maze was passed, and at a touch signal the invaders halted. A few yards farther on was the council chamber, to get to which an open, lighted space had to be crossed—a space about which was arranged an ingenious system of mirrors which showed to the council chamber any one who attempted to approach. It was this system of mirrors which, more than anything else, had necessitated the disguises; for the reason that the conspirators expected, at frequent intervals, a number of ward-heelers with reports concerning the temper and disposition of the people.

Musgrave himself was impersonating the first of these underlings. Now, preceded by the deaf-and-dumb slave and Sinclair—also supposed to be a slave—who had been detailed to guide him, Musgrave approached the curtain of the council chamber. Behind these three, hidden in the bark, waited the soldiers, ready at a given signal to rush the twelve ringleaders.

It was a tense moment. The curtain was pulled back by an unseen hand, and the two Englishmen looked upon the place which the men of their race had sought for nearly a century. Except for rugs hanging on the walls, there was no furniture in the chamber, for, high caste though the twelve were, they preferred to squat in a circle on their haunches in regular native fashion.

But what caused Sinclair to catch his breath and made Musgrave stare was the fact that two of the twelve were staring into two gold boxes, held between their knees, in which they now and then moved something very gently with ivory, flat-ended wands, the while muttering aloud something which appeared greatly to interest the other ten.

And it was obvious that they knew something had gone wrong with their plans, for they all showed agitation to a degree seldom shown by a high-caste native. Then suddenly one of the twelve gave a signal, only visible to the deaf-and-dumb leader of the two white men, and he stepped forward—Sinclair and Musgrave following.

Slowly and with well-simulated abjectness the three advanced until, within six feet of the twelve, Musgrave dropped an empty tin can. For a second the twelve looked up, frowning but not suspecting the clattering can was a signal, and at that moment Musgrave and Sinclair rushed, followed in a rushing charge by the disguised soldiers.

"Watch their hands," shouted Sinclair, fearful that by touching a lever one of the twelve might bring Underground Calcutta in ruins upon them.

And watch their hands they did, but the hands were too quick. With a simultaneousness that savored of a drill, ten of the twelve raised a hand to their mouths, while the two with the gold boxes emptied, each of them, the contents of two concealed bottles into the boxes—out of which rose the fumes and steam of some powerful acid, which may have been nitric.

"They were ready, you see," panted Sinclair. "They had heard things were going wrong. But we've got two of them."

So it came to pass that only two of the Inner Twelve were taken alive. The other ten were dead from the effects of a rapid poison. And Sinclair, after looking into the gold boxes in which was nothing but the fuming acid, grinned at Musgrave, who stood in a bewildered way with his beard tastefully draped over his left shoulder.

"It may have been slugs," he said, "but, as we will never know, it's no use arguing. Whatever they had in the boxes, they thought so much of it that they took time to destroy it—although they knew we would get them and hang them—while their friends had time to honorably commit suicide. It's a queer world."

Musgrave might have agreed with him that it was a queer world, but he was so bewildered by the place he found himself in and by the events of the evening, that he stood like a man stunned but still able, in some unusual way, to keep his feet. Indeed, when the second body of soldiers arrived—in uniform—Sinclair had to prompt him to give orders. And Sinclair himself was showing an extraordinary nervousness.

The little deaf-and-dumb leader, who stood by smiling happily, pointed to one of the rugs on the wall. Sinclair tore it down, exposing the door of a great safe.

"The treasure of the years," he said, awed, "wrung from the people for the end that did not come."

He stepped forward and began to twirl the knob of the combination.

"What? Do you know how to open it, you wizard—" gasped Musgrave.

"I do," replied Sinclair, wondering if Musgrave would think him such a wizard if he knew how dependent he had been on the deaf-and-dumb servants. "It isn't much of a combination, because they never expected any one to get this far. The maze was better than any safe, and they had a way of dropping the roof on themselves, I think, if they had had time."

Then he swung open the door, and with a gurgle of delight the deaf-and-dumb leader rushed into the safe.

There was a sound of rushing air, and a square block of steel, weighing at least a ton, fell upon the unfortunate little native, crushing him into pulp.

Musgrave turned away, horrified. A soldier with a record of many border wars, this happening and the strain of the night had affected him more than anything in his experience.

"I should have thought of that," Sinclair spoke contritely. "Poor chap—and if he hadn't rushed in there, it might have been you or I."

To describe the treasure would be to merely catalog riches. And, indeed, the fashion and wonder of many of the jewels would baffle any description. Besides, the Government never made public the amount of wealth discovered, though every cent of it either has been, or will be, devoted to the perennial famine relief of India's poor—to which end the British have for years poured out gold; which is something the advocates of self-government never mention.

But, in spite of the most careful search, no trace of the dead white women captives was ever found, which disappointed Sinclair greatly. So, for a time, the specter of rebellion was laid.

Yet mysteries remained, noticeably that of the "telegraph"—since no man of ordinary common sense would accept the slug theory. Musgrave laughed for the first time in hours when Sinclair again referred to the possible contents of the gold boxes.

"But you are entitled to all the curious beliefs you may wish to hold," he spoke deferentially, "after what you have done. How can we reward you?"

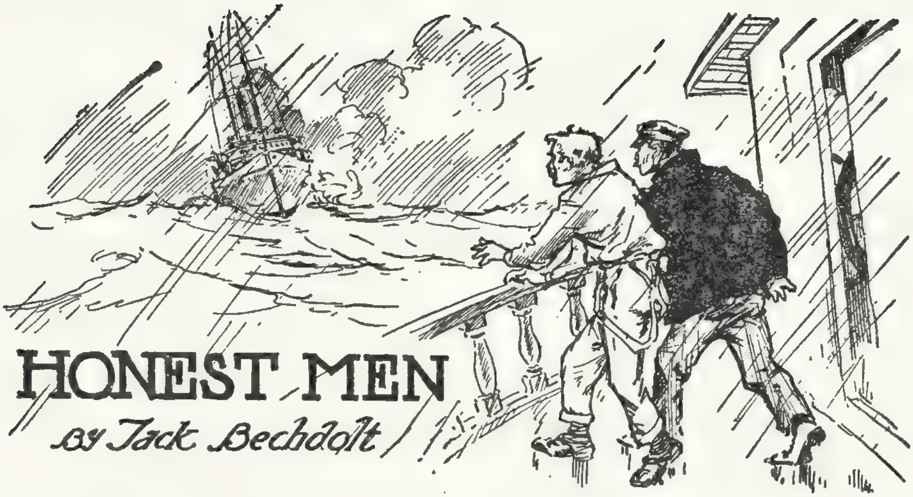
"I told you that I wanted no reward. I only want to live my life as it pleases me—what is left of it," Sinclair replied, shivering with nervousness in spite of himself.

"But we will see you often?" Musgrave spoke, curious about Sinclair's condition, but too polite to refer to it.

"Perhaps. I don't know. But I must go now. In this disguise I need a pass. Please give me one. I need a smoke."

Musgrave produced a cigaret-case from his unusual clothing and proffered it.

"No, thank you." Sinclair tried to smile. "I—er—don't use that brand."



HONEST MEN

by Jack Bechdolt

Author of "The Glorious Holiday," "Dead Reckoning," etc.

GROUND-SWELLS from the storm outside set the old sternwheel steamer *Puget Queen* to making awkward curtseys that chafed her bow and stern lines. Rain, hurled by a demoniac wind, swept the decks of the homely little freighter, and rain drummed incessantly at the windows of the box-like pilot-house where a little, old-fashioned stove glowed cozily.

The shabby, comfortable little pilot-house was a delightful retreat in bad weather, but young Captain Dan Halsey and Captain "Fog-Horn" Hood were not enjoying it. When two men who are fast friends and have been making a good fight together, winning against overpowering odds, discover that they have been betrayed at the moment of their victory, they are not in a mood to appreciate little things like comfort from the storm.

Captain Dan, who was president and owner of the Halsey Navigation & Freighting Co. and sole proprietor of the old *Queen*, had come aboard but five minutes ago after an all-night trip from Seattle by train. Captain Hood looked as if he had just risen hastily from his bunk. Only those who knew him would see nothing unusual in his appearance. His rumpled white hair stood up wildly about his red, weather-beaten face. His scrubbing-brush mustache bristled like a barbed-wire entanglement.

He wore a red-flannel shirt from which his trousers seemed about to part company, partly due to his habit of allowing his suspenders to dangle from his waist. On his feet were the battered carpet-slippers that clad him in all weather, and in his mouth was a disreputable corn-cob pipe.

Fog-Horn Hood blinked owlishly at Captain Dan.

"Listen, Danny boy," he growled. "Sure somebody ain't been stuffing you—tryin' to throw a scare into you?"

"Do I look as if I was easy to stampede?" snapped Halsey. "You know better'n that. I tell you, it's straight—I verified it all. Richmond P. Bown's got us this time, Fog-Horn—got us by the scruff of the neck. Yes, better'n that—he's tied a mill-stone round my neck; and I'm walking the plank—the fat, sleek, poisonous toad!"

"Aye, toad he is," nodded Fog-Horn Hood, "a puffy, slick, slippery toad—but Dan, we've licked him before, licked him to a frazzle. How can he smash us now? Ain't we got the contract to haul the Rainier Packing Company's freight from Fir Point, good for two-years' business? He can't get that away from us!"

Captain Dan sighed wearily.

"Fog-Horn," he complained, "I wish you had a better head for business. Oh well, listen again; I'll tell it slow. We got the freighting contract from Col. Featherstone, yes—good for two years' business—and to comply with that we obligated ourselves to buy another steamer——"

"Which we did; coming up from Oakland now," nodded Hood.

"Yes—God help us! Paid for and coming up now. To do that, I had to plaster the old *Queen* and tie up all the security I own. Then along comes this chance to bid for the business of the Island Produce Company, moving all that fruit and truck from Klahowya Island to market, a good all-year-round business. You remember, Fog-Horn, I couldn't believe anybody loved us enough to give us a tip to underbid Bown for that business? I figured this Tom Farwell, who says he controls the Island Produce concern, was a crook, working for Bown. If I'd only known then what I know now!

"Tom Farwell is just what I suspected, but couldn't prove. He is Bown's dummy, holding control of the Island Produce Company until Bown wants to step in—the whole thing is a plant to ruin us.

"Bown deliberately bought control in the island company, put it in Farwell's name, got us to bid for their hauling business, awarded us the contract on condition we add still another boat to our fleet and, by thunder, Fog-Horn, Bown was slick enough to advance his own money to us, under cover of the Tidal Trust Company, so I'd tie myself up to buy another boat!

"And now, the minute that money is tied up as a guarantee to the shipyards and I'm bound hand and foot with debts, Bown steps in in person, takes control of the Island Produce Company and today the stockholders meet to cancel our hauling contract——"

"Why, they—they can't do that!" gasped Hood.

"Oh, no," sneered Captain Dan, "can't they? You talk like the man that was locked up and said, 'They can't put me in jail for this.' But there he was! I tell you Bown controls the company; Bown will vote to cancel our contract, and Bown will do it—and that leaves us holding the sack. We're gone, smashed, down for good. Why, there won't even be any oil on the water to show where they sank us!"

"You're dead sure it's straight——"

"I got the tip from old Col. Featherstone, because he's my friend," said Dan Halsey bitterly. "Then I nosed around and verified it. He's got us smashed, all right——"

"But, Danny, ain't there no comeback—the law——"

"The law! Why, Fog-Horn, you talk like a Siwash. I could sue, sure, but where's the money coming from to bring law-suits against the head of the steamboat trust? Why, Bown can fight in the courts for years——"

Dan Halsey slumped forward on the locker seat, buried his face in his hands and gave himself over to black visions.

Fog-Horn Hood began to shuffle back and forth the width of the pilot-house, stealing an occasional glance at his friend, shaking his shaggy head and muttering to himself. Fog-Horn's interest in the failure of the Halsey Freighting and Navigation Company was largely unselfish. He owned five acres of land and a shack on Chuckanut Bay, enough to support him and his wife the rest of his life. But Dan Halsey's sorrow cut him to the heart.

Years ago, before Richmond P. Bown had brought about his disgrace as a steamboat captain, Fog-Horn had helped the elder Dan Halsey establish his steamboat business. He had a genuine affection for Halsey's son, heightened by the fact that young Dan had trusted him after other men had cast him off as a derelict. He and young Dan had fought hard to win a little business away from the steamboat trust; it was bitter to lose it all, bitterest for young Dan, whose wife was a semi-invalid for whom he slaved without stint.

And, above all, Fog-Horn Hood hated Bown, the man who had disgraced him.

He stood beside Halsey, one corded hand awkwardly resting on the younger man's shoulder.

"Danny," he pleaded, "show some life—we ain't beat yet. Ain't there no fight in you?"

"No," cried Halsey miserably. "I'm through."

"You're through!" roared Fog-Horn with an abrupt change to scorn. "Yes, I reckon you are—you low-down yallow dawg!"

Captain Dan merely shrugged indifferently at the insult.

"Sure, you'll quit," rumbled Fog-horn. "Nâturally! I never seen a Halsey yet that wasn't a quitter—yallow all through, the hull —— family——"

Dan Halsey sprang up convulsively, fists doubled, mouth open to make an angry answer, but he stopped half-way, turned back and resumed his attitude of despondency.

FOG-HORN HOOD paid no attention to this demonstration. He continued to pace and soliloquize in a voice that made the windows rattle.

"There was your dad," he went on scathingly, "yallow all over, he was. 'Yallow-Streak' Halsey the boys used to call him. Regular member of the *Kamerad* Club, he was—and then there was your——"

"Drop that!" Dan Halsey was on his feet now, gray eyes blazing a warning. "That'll do for you," he added, his voice hard with anger.

Fog-Horn never paused in his pacing or his soliloquy.

"Yes, and there was your mother," he boomed, "she was a quit——"

Halsey leaped for the old man, aiming a terrific right punch as he leaped.

Hood swung to meet his leap, quick as a cat. As Halsey's fist whiffed past his ear, he landed a blow of his own very handily.

The younger man recovered in a second. Foot to foot they went at it, giving blow for blow. The grizzled skipper was a good match for his younger employer, both in skill and muscle.

Suddenly Hood shot an arm about Halsey's shoulder, caught him in a bear-trap embrace and pinioned his hands. Halsey met his steady gaze with a countenance writhing in anger.

"Come, cut it out," advised Hood calmly. "We're wasting time, boy."

"You take back what you said about my mother, —— you!" gasped Halsey.

Hood's face was stern.

"Are you a quitter?" he demanded.

"No, and you know I'm not, but——"

"Of course you're not! As for your mother—God rest her soul—why, Danny boy, you know that saving and aside from Mary Hood there wasn't a woman in the world I worshiped like I did her. You know that, boy. But when you start quitting——"

"I know, Fog-Horn, and—I'm ashamed of myself—and sorry. I won't do it again——"

"Now you're shouting. We ain't through fighting Bown yet——"

"But how can we fight?" puzzled Dan.

"Well," declared the veteran of rough and tumble, "I've always noticed the good Lord sends a scrap to any man who's looking for one. First place, when's this meeting to come off—I mean the Products concern, where they're going to bust our contract?"

"Today—at Klahowya."

"Bown'll be there, then?"

"Of course."

"Then we'd better be going——"

"We can't do a thing; he controls the company——"

"Can't! Can't!" roared Fog-Horn. "How in —— do you know till you try it, how——"

"Sure, Fog-Horn, you're right. How do I know! We'll start for the island at once. I'll talk to that crowd like a Dutch uncle, and, by thunder, if they do turn me down they'll know good and plain what I think of their crookedness. We'll die with our boots on, anyhow."

"You said something then," declared the old man, a wide grin rippling his mangy mustache. "Well, let's get there ahead of Bown if we can and—say, Dan, how's Bown going to Klahowya?"

"Don't know for sure," Halsey answered. "He was in Seattle when I left last night. Must figure on coming up here on a later train and crossing to the island in one of his boats—didn't I see the *Councilor* taking oil this morning?"

"The *Councilor*," mused Fog-Horn Hood. "Why sure, I reckon that's the way Bown figures on traveling. The *Councilor*—le's see; young squirt named Ford's skippering her. Nice boy, too. H'm."

Fog-Horn Hood glanced from the pilot-house window, lost in deep thought. Suddenly he chuckled.

"You're right, Dan; there she comes now, up from the oil-docks and—look! If my eyes ain't gone back on me there's Richmond P. Bown over there on the dock, just climbing out of his auto."

The dock leased for exclusive use of the Tilikum Lines was only across the slipway from where the old *Puget Queen* tied up. Dan Halsey, looking across, saw the well-known, clumsy figure of his enemy descending from a limousine splattered with mud. It was evident that Bown had motored over country roads in haste to be on hand for the crushing of his presumptuous rival in the freighting business.

And out in the bay, headed for the wharf, was Bown's crack liner, the *Councilor*, a flashing white boat, steel hull towering high with tier upon tier of cabins, huge green funnels set at a rakish angle—a floating palace of a boat that made the humble and dirty *Queen* seem lowly as a garbage-scow.

The *Councilor* was Bown's pride. She was the handsomest, most expensive craft ever tried in sound passenger traffic. It was typical of Bown's arrogance to use her this morning for his personal errand. It was a symbol of his Kaiser-like powers.

But even the *Councilor*, with her powerful engines and screw propeller, was having her troubles making a landing at the exposed end of the wharf, for the gale out of the south was no respecter of steamboat magnates or floating palaces. Hood, who had gotten the little *Queen* under way in astonishingly short time, stared from his window and chuckled as the *Councilor* twice missed her bow ropes and drifted off in the wind.

"Yes, Danny," he observed, "Ford's a nice lad, I'll allow, but he ain't no spellbinder yet—takes years to teach a man how to dock slick and clean in this kind of a blow."

As he spoke, Fog-Horn spun the wheel and set the *Queen's* nose quartering into the gale. The squattering hull plunged, bow first, into a comber, staggered up for air with a foot of green water raking her forward deck and commenced a clumsy, galloping polka step that led her into the wilderness of white water and the gray, rain-swept mystery of the storm.

The old *Puget Queen* had her work cut out this day.

Fog-Horn's invitation, shouted down the speaking-tube, to "give her steam till she blows her crown-sheet," was answered with a will by "Doc" Newman, chief engineer.

The aged wooden hull racked and trembled with the maddened plunge of pistons and the buffet of heavy seas. The vast, ridiculously overgrown stern wheel, that made the little freighter a humpback, lashed the waves into froth as it plowed its furrow.

From below there came a confused crash of dishes and pans fetching loose in the galley. The dingy, tasseled curtain-pulls in the pilot-house swung in wild arcs. And, as the faithful old *Queen* leaped sturdily into perils, so did the spirits of the two in her pilot-house rise to fighting level.

Dan Halsey paced erratically from side to side, staggering with the little freighter's wild plunges, his white teeth bared in a grin, the light of battle in his gray eyes. Fog-Horn Hood had his legs spread wide, steadying himself by the *Queen's* overgrown steering-wheel, red-faced from the exertion of holding an unwieldy rudder steady in that madness of wind and wave. He had jammed his battered uniform cap, which bore the legend "Captain" in letters of faded gilt, rakishly on one side of his head, and his corn-cob pipe streamed sparks.

Halsey thrust his head from a window.

"*Councilor's* just quitting the dock," he reported. "Can't hardly make her out, the rain's so thick."

"He'll beat us in half an hour, spite of all we can do," grunted Hood.

"He's crazy to take that big boat into Klahowya Bay," cried Halsey. "That channel's none too wide."

"Reckons he's got to make a big showing; that's Bown every time," guessed Hood. "What do we care? 'Tain't our boat! If I ever get this old girl in the lee of the spit I'll give thanks—let Bown do his own worrying, Danny."

TOGETHER they stared dubiously ahead. It was impossible to keep the pilot-house windows closed because of the sheets of rain that obscured them. Open, they gave the storm free sweep, and both men were soaking to the waist.

"Funny we don't make out the island," puzzled Halsey after another half-hour that was one long succession of moments when both held their breath and expected the worst.

There was reason for their fears. Seas were smashing all the windows of the *Queen's* lower deck. Olson, the first officer, had reported a couple of feet of water in the boiler-pit. The scuppers were unable to drain the flood, and it threatened to fill the stout wooden hull. Nor could the *Queen's* frantic crew keep the broken lights stuffed with mattresses, so violent was the onslaught against her weather beam.

"Island's all right; takes more of a storm than this'n to blow Klahowya away," declared Fog-Horn as both men, one to a side, struggled with the kicking wheel. "What gets me is why the *Councilor* don't pass. Where is she, Dan?"

"Still dead astern, half a dozen boat-lengths off," Halsey reported, snatching a glance through the pilot-house rear windows. "Must be she's—by the almighty powers, Fog-Horn, I've got it! Ford's afraid to trust his reckoning. He's following you!"

Fog-Horn Hood took the compliment calmly.

"'Twouldn't surprize me," he grunted. "Dang this wheel. Get into it, you old *Queen!* Come on, baby—show 'em the way, you barnacle-eaten old skate!"

"There's the bluff," Halsey shouted, "four points off to port. See it?"

Fog-Horn nodded.

"Knew I'd—fetch—it," he panted. "Look, Dan, she smells the land! Wheel's easing up already. There, girlie, there, *Queen*, easy does it now."

Fog-Horn loosed a voice famous the breadth of the Pacific Coast, casting his warning in the general direction of the engine-room speaking-tube:

"Look out for a bath, Doc. We're going t' dive!"

They fought the wheel over, to set the *Queen* for the mouth of Klahowya Bay and the comparative shelter in the lee of the long sand-spit that reached out from the foot of the bluff. The maneuver put their snub-nosed craft into the trough of the sea.

A second of comparative calm—then the *Queen* lifted high with a roller. Up and up she rose, a dizzy climb. A terrifying moment she staggered, then—souse! The flat-bottomed hull fell into the hollows and the next great wave licked its green tongue as high as the hurricane-deck.

The snub-nosed freighter recoiled from the blow, rolled to starboard, a giddy, heart-stopping lunge that seemed never to end. The speaking-tube shrilled a warning. Dan Halsey took its message.

"Hey, for the sake of suffering salmon," came Doc Newman's grieved complaint. "The water's putting out our fires—what the——"

Crash! The *Queen* righted herself like the snap of a whip. A new and ominous tremor passed through the old hull, and there came a crunching noise that seemed to shake her to the marrow.

"Lost a—paddle-blade," gasped Halsey.

"Feels like half a dozen," nodded Hood. "She'll stand about one more—give me a hand, Dan—hard over now!"

Now they had swung her far enough over so that the second wave took them quartering and spent its force on the stern. They heard a plank from the paddle-box rip loose. The *Queen's* moments seemed numbered. Breathless they waited an awful time—and breathed their relief. The old tub had wallowed around until she met the force of the rollers with her stern, and now, as quickly as a stage trick, the storm seemed to have dropped, for they were moving with the wind and swimming safely.

In five minutes the little freighter was under the lee of the spit, walking sedately. The quiet was bewildering.

Fog-Horn Hood glanced astern for the *Councilor*.

"Following us like a yallow dawg," he chuckled. "Lucky he had a convoy!"

Dan Halsey strode to the rear windows and peered back at the splendid *Councilor*. The big, white liner was rounding the spit, canted far to starboard, a plume of white foam curling off her knife-like bow, the leaping seas playing about her tall freeboard. The blue mist hung about her; white spray dripped from the molding at the hull line; a ribbon of smoke blew straight as a ruled line from her big stacks. She glistened with wet and flashed with color, a beautiful sight for any lover of steamboats.

A little of envy embittered the rage that rose in Dan's heart at this picture. To him the *Councilor* meant Richmond P. Bown, the man who had stopped at no trickery to crush him—and such a ship was also his ambition and day-dream, the few times he was given to day-dreaming.

Standing there, peering through the narrow windows, he shook his fist.

"You crooked yellow dog," he shouted, as if Bown himself could hear him. Do you get nothing honestly, you cheat? It's like you—and those who work for you—to filch from better men. Yes, even your navigation. When you're in a tight hole you have to follow your betters, Bown—then lie about it afterward! That's it, spoke for spoke, you've got our course—point for point. You'd sicken a cat, Bown, for you're yellow all through. Look at them, Fog-Horn, look!"

Fog-Horn Hood made no answer, nor did he turn his head. He had that head thrust through the window, and, regardless of a waterspout that drenched him, he was peering ahead, looking, listening, sniffing as if the very taint of salt and weed could tell him secrets.

"You're going to beat me today, Bown," Halsey cried again. "I daresay you can do it with money. But you can't lick me;

you can't smash either one of us—you hear that, Bown? Do you hear that?

"Fog-Horn," he flung over his shoulder, "by all that's holy, you've made a man of me again, and I—we—you and I, old Fog-Horn—well, it's going to take more than Richmond P. Bown to—suffering salmon! Look—Fog-Horn, look at that. They—they—the *Councilor*——"

"Yeah?" grunted Fog-Horn with a vast assumption of indifference.

Halsey was incoherent with excitement.

"They've gone—a-a-aground. They're stuck, stuck fast; look, you old walrus, look at them!"

Fog-Horn Hood rang promptly to stop the *Queen's* engines, lashed the kicking wheel and strolled with a slow, affected swagger to peer back at his rival.

"Why, so they be," he observed in mild astonishment. "Hard and fast aground on Klahowya Spit! Now, ain't that a shame!"

The *Councilor* had stopped with an abrupt jar. Slowly the big hull canted to port, and the waves she had stemmed so arrogantly leaped up in fury to sweep her high decks.

A vast white mushroom of steam rose above her, and a few seconds later the wind brought them a bellow of surprize, rage, helpless grief. The proud Tilikum liner was bawling like a lost calf.

For the first time in five minutes Dan Halsey glanced at the *Queen's* own course. His eyes widened; words strangled in his throat. He turned on Fog-Horn Hood and pointed a shaking finger, a gesture which Fog-Horn persisted in regarding with mild astonishment.

"You—you old—devil—you old son of a barnacle!" he roared and leaped to throw his arms about the old man.

In that swift embrace Fog-Horn Hood was capered about the swaying deck with extreme indecorum.

"Hey," protested Fog-Horn, "hey, easy all—easy, I tell you. You aim to strangle me, Danny boy? Stand off, you whiffet. Can't you see there's a vessel in distress out there? I got to give 'em a hand!"

"You—you've got the nerve of the devil himself," marveled Dan Halsey. "Why, you old scoundrel, if Bown knew what you did he—why they could put you in jail for——"

"Hold on there, Dan," warned Fog-Horn quickly. "Don't you say it. We ain't done nothing to anybody, and don't you forget that for a minute, my son. A hint ought to be enough for you, Dan Halsey!"

"You're dead right," gasped Dan soberly. "I don't know a thing about it, not a thing. Your course is your own business. As for me, I wasn't even looking where—listen; they're bellowing for help again."

Down-wind came a series of short, frantic hoots from the *Councilor's* steam siren.

"We'll go out and talk," declared Fog-Horn. "Always ready to help a neighbor in distress—that's us, Danny. Always glad to help," he paused and emphasized his point with an elaborate wink and a nudge at Halsey's ribs, "for a consideration. Remember this is salvage, boy, and don't you feel too soft-hearted——"

"Salvage! Good fathers, Fog-Horn, we haven't got power enough to tow him off!"

"We have," asserted the veteran.

"You know better——"

"We have so. Boy, I tell you we have. Ain't that enough?"

Halsey looked curiously at his old friend. Well he knew that the *Puget Queen* was no modern tow-boat to drag the heavy *Councilor* from the spit, where wind and wave were making her bed deeper with each moment. Well he knew it, yet here was old Fog-Horn Hood, who knew it too, declaring mysteriously the thing could be done.

"If you say so," Halsey agreed slowly, "why—of course—well you've done pretty well so far, old-timer; so——"

"All you got to do's talk terms, Danny boy. Soak him!"

"Will I, oh, will I!"

THE shabby *Puget Queen* slipped easily under the quiet lee of the stranded liner. The listing white palace towered directly above them so that the two men on her navigation-bridge looked directly down upon the two who stood at the door of the *Queen's* pilot-house. Of these men, Bown was one. His face was red and angry.

Leaning over the rail, Bown shook a fat, gloved fist at Fog-Horn Hood and ignored Dan Halsey.

"What d'you mean, Captain Hood," he wheezed, "misleading us on to this shoal? Do you know, sir, you are guilty of deliberately wrecking my boat—guilty of a crime for which I can put you in the State prison for life? Answer me, Captain. By heaven, your excuse will have to be a good one—deliberately tolling us in here on to the spit!"

Hood in turn ignored the steamboat magnate.

"Morning, Captain Ford," he greeted, "sorry t'see you got into a scrape. Anything I can do?"

"You answer me!" wheezed Bown, frantic with rage. "You—you white-haired old wrecker—you pirate—you——"

Hood stepped back a pace or two toward the pilot-house.

"That's a powerful noisy passenger you got there, Cap," he observed, "and he's right annoying too. Reckon I'll be mooching on if——"

"Wait!" shouted Ford, summoning up courage to speak for himself. "This looks pretty queer, Captain Hood, dragging us in here on to this shoal, when——"

"Dragging you?" puzzled Hood. "Who, me drag you? Why, Captain, I didn't know before I had any tow-ropes on you—thought I was going about my own business, in fact. My gosh A'mighty, Cap," Hood's voice rose in sudden surprize, "you don't mean t' say you tried to follow my lead when you come in here! I see it all now—oh, my land, Captain Ford—I never knew you didn't know Klahowya Bay!

"Why, the ship-channel bears way off there to sta'b'ard—clear over under the cut bank. So you followed me—you drawing full fifteen feet of water and the old *Queen* so light she'll float on the sweat of an honest man's brow! Now ain't that too bad?"

Young Captain Ford, the cock-sure czar of a handsome and easy passenger run, spluttered wordlessly, grew red in the face and drew back out of sight.

"Well," soliloquized Fog-Horn Hood, "guess our help ain't needed, Cap'n Halsey. We'll be jogging on——"

"Wait," wheezed Bown, arms uplifted in entreaty. "Wait—we want a tow—if there's a chance your old tub can loose us, I—I'll make you good terms, I——"

A momentary thrill passed over the *Councilor*. A ground-swell, larger than its brothers, lifted the great steel hull slightly and dropped it in disgust. The sea had only dealt its plaything a friendly tap in passing, but steel masts had swayed alarmingly; the vast white fabric groaned and shuddered. From the handsome passenger saloon came a muffled crash.

"Oh, God!" gasped Bown. His gross face turned pasty white, leaving his mean little eyes staring with pig-like terror. "Captain Hood," he implored, "give us a line—tow us off if you can, or get help, I—I'll make it worth—your while—I——"

"Yep, you need help all right," Fog-Horn observed with impersonal interest. "Tide's turning now and, when she's out, look's if the old *Councilor* 'd clean turn turtle. Well, I don't know—about terms now——"

"Any terms—any decent terms—leave it to a salvage court!" cried Bown.

"No," Fog-Horn decided, "not to no salvage court about here; you're too —— popular, Bown. But here's my boss, Captain Halsey. If he thinks we can spare the time——"

"Bown," shouted Dan Halsey curtly, "listen. I'll give you terms, the only terms I care to consider. You bought control of the Klahowya Island Products Company; I know all about that. You were going to knock that contract of mine in the head this morning. Give me a promise to approve my bid, and we tow you off. Otherwise——"

Some of the color flooded back to Bown's puffy cheeks. The little eyes glared.

"I—I'll see you hanged first!" he wheezed. "You and your fool——"

Another shudder racked the stranded liner. Captain Ford reappeared on the bridge quick as a vision from a stage trapdoor. He advised with his boss in a low, earnest tone.

"All right, all right," puffed Bown. "You win, Halsey. I promise, I——"

"In writing," prompted Dan Halsey. He controlled his voice by an effort, but his fists were twitching. "A written promise. Throw it down to me; then we'll see what we can do."

Bown wheeled about, clawed his way up the sloping bridge and disappeared. Halsey and Fog-Horn Hood exchanged a glance of mingled doubt and triumph. Would Bown do it—would he surrender?

In a very brief time they had their answer. Bown was back. He tossed a folded paper, weighted by an iron bolt, to the deck of the *Queen*. Halsey opened it and nodded satisfaction.

"Now," he said to Hood, "save him, if

you can. By thunder, I don't see how we can do it!"

Fog-Horn merely grinned and winked mysteriously.

The young owner of the *Queen* stood by, an interested and doubtful spectator, while the tubby little freighter took aboard a stout manila tow-rope from the *Councilor*. He sniffed incredulously when that rope was stretched tight and the *Queen's* rusty stack belched smoke and sparks.

The dripping tow-line quivered. The *Queen* racked and groaned under the strain. Fog-Horn Hood steadied the big wheel and whistled tunelessly.

Five minutes passed while the *Queen* tugged, tugged her best to slip the *Councilor*, stern first, off the sand. So a gnat might have tried to tow an elephant.

Then came the miracle.

The *Councilor* stirred from her bed; the *Queen* gained a few feet. A moment later the pride of the Tilikum Lines was slipping docilely off Klahowya Spit, following behind the battered and humble freighter. The thing was done!

Dan Halsey gripped his old friend by the shoulder and shook him roughly.

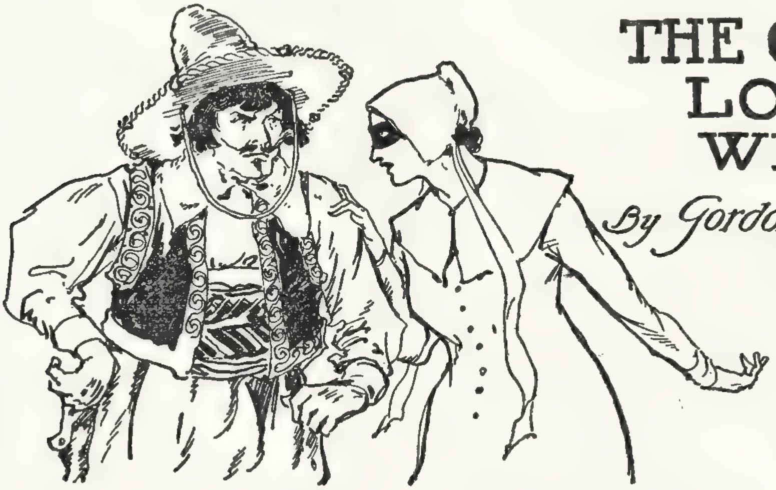
"How," he demanded, "how did you do it? Fog-Horn, come through with the answer, you hear me?"

"If I did, you'd feel foolish," Hood protested.

"If you don't, I'll change that ugly map of yours so your own wife won't know you. How——"

"Well," grinned Fog-Horn Hood, "you and Ford think alike, that's all I got to say. You figure it was high tide on Klahowya Spit because the tide-table says it ought to be. Of course you do, just like a lot of young fellows that know so much. If you'd navigated this sound before they was any tide-tables to calc'late by, maybe you'd know something—f'r instance, maybe you'd know that a gale out of the south holds back the flood off that spit for as much as an hour—which it certainly did today, boy.

"Why, Danny, if I'd give him ten minutes more, the *Councilor* 'd just naturally have floated off Klahowya Spit; then where'd your contract be?"



THE GOOD LOSER WINS

By Gordon Young

Author of "Law and Order," "Evidence," etc.

THIS is the story of how Alexina Grimshaw got the husband she wanted, when, even after the marriage, she despaired of having him—that is, of having him whom she wanted.

Grimshaw, her late husband, had killed three men, been through many rough and tumble shootings where men draw without warning and die without time for so much as a whispered prayer; but in the Fall of '50 in San Francisco he cashed in. Dysentery took him. As Alexina was pretty, young and sole heir of the gambling-house, there was much blackening of boots and clipping of beards. The price of "biled" shirts became as high as that of crowbars. Twenty dollars each.

Alexina had married at eighteen and was widowed at twenty-three. She was a natural born mimic and for her own personal amusement had learned to deal crooked faro; otherwise she was just a helpless, pretty, blonde, demure, baby-faced girl-wife. Grimshaw had been an intelligent man, a gambler and gentleman unafraid. When he knew that he was dying, he took her hand and spoke words of wisdom:

"Wear black for a while; then get another husband, little girl. Don't mind me. Be sure to pick a good loser; better still if you can get a good winner. Get a man that plays a square game—no matter if he does eat peas with a knife. A girl like you needs a husband. Kiss me now—I feel the devil tugging at my toes."

She had kissed him and cried. And, when he was buried, she felt that she had lost a father.

In due course of time she came to feel that she would marry Perris Farthingham or Chuck Lewis or Jack Rickard. Farthingham was a gentleman and invested in mines that other people discovered; Lewis was big and burly and brave as a catamount—a hungry catamount, that is—and owned real estate; Rickard was slender, young, quiet, impassive and a gambler. The handsomest man of the three was probably Farthingham: tall, broad-shouldered, polite. And people said that he was English.

Alexina, so it was reported, knew nothing of men. She was doll-faced and possessed innocent, trusting eyes. People took the face and eyes at their apparent unsophistication. Alexina had great respect for the memory and advice of her late husband.

"Be sure," Grimshaw had said, "to pick a good loser."

So Alexina got out a little ivory box with which she had idled away many hours. It was a deal box for faro, and it was crooked. She invited the three men for a private game—and she trimmed them. Farthingham smiled as he threw his last dollar down. Chuck Lewis joked as he scraped the bottom of his long sack. Jack Rickard did not change a line in his face as he pushed back his chair and said quietly——

"That finishes me."

And Alexina was no nearer to a decision than ever.

The next day she sent for them one by one and, privately returning to each his losses, said that for the fun of the thing she had dealt from a crooked box and, of course, couldn't keep the money. She hoped he wouldn't hold it against her. And he mustn't think such cheating was tolerated in the house—remember, she fell heir to Grimshaw's gambling-place—itself.

Farthingham protested that no one would dare think of such a thing—as that the house was not straight. And as for the trimming she had given him—well, he thought it was a good bit of fun, and he didn't mind losing as much as she seemed to think, since she was returning the money. He thanked her in such a charming, polite way for the refund that she was sure she could make no mistake in giving her hand to him.

Then Chuck Lewis came, and he laughed heartily. He pointed out merrily that he couldn't take back all the money because there was the banker's percentage to be considered. Lewis' good nature and scrupulous honesty made a very favorable impression upon her.

In his turn Jack Rickard was told what she had told the others. He smiled and, with a slight, emphatic gesture, indicated his refusal to accept the money. A flush of anger swept over Alexina.

But Rickard said simply:

"Mrs. Grimshaw, I am not a child. If I had won, I wouldn't have returned your money. It is my business to know whether or not the dealer is straight—so I have no claim to this."

"You knew the box was crooked?" she asked quickly. "And you let me break you, anyway?"

"Certainly not," said Rickard.

But she was not sure.

When he left, she found herself wondering more about him than about the others. If he had known the box was crooked and had been too gallant to give any indication of that knowledge—then he was a finer man than she suspected. Suddenly she remembered that he was a professional gambler, and probably her amateurish skill, sufficient to deceive most people, had not deceived him. Or maybe Rickard had refused the money merely to impress her. Maybe he had known just how to hint that he had been aware that she dealt a crooked game. It was hard to decide.

She was firm in her intention to find

something definite and distinguishing that would give her assurance that one of those three men was more gallant, more deeply honest than the others. She wanted to be relieved of all doubt. Besides, she found herself beginning to prefer one of them, and, as she wished to be absolutely impartial, this did not seem quite honest. She would test them all alike.

AT LAST she hit on a plan. It was dangerous. It might lead to killing, and, perforce, she would be left with the quickest on the trigger as the only candidate for her hand. In which case, however, she could refuse him after all. The plans of women, particularly of the doll-faced women, are ruthless. They try the souls of men, and are forsooth called heartless because, with an impenetrable finesse, they are only being very careful.

A fancy mask-ball was given. Twelve months later the wife and daughter of Col. Sutherland would not have attended a ball given by a gambler's widow; nor would any other of the "better" citizens and their wives. San Francisco developed rapidly, but for a short period there was no perceptible social demarcation. If women were not utter outcasts, they belonged to the best society. And Alexina's ball was a big event socially.

There were two orchestras, a hundred-foot bar and a bright mass of glassware shimmering in the mirror. Overhead hung scores of American flags, all sizes, and a hundred lamps and lanterns burned amid the rafters, from which tinsel and colored paper was festooned. Ships that rounded the Horn carried all manner of luxuries and oddities in their holds—so that everything, anything except necessities, could be had in plenty. There might be a shortage in mining tools, but never in gaudy stuffs and women's silks.

A ticket-taker stood at the door—for this was an invitation dance—and by him stood two policemen. No one thought it odd or impertinent for these policemen to relieve all who came of their weapons and to give a check by which they could be later reclaimed. Such precaution was acceptable to all. Balls had a way of breaking up in a manner that brought confusion upon the guests.

There were grotesque costumes and others rich and finished: rags and tatters of imitation beggars, velvet and gold of courtiers, Yankees, Englishmen, soldiers and sailors, Spanish ladies and Dutch girls; also Puritan maidens. The crowd mingled freely and happily, danced and laughed. Tea and coffee were offered for the ladies—and the gentlemen bought their own drinks.

Alexina had cajoled Farthingham, Lewis and Rickard into telling her what costume each would wear. She had told them she would appear as a Spanish dancer—with red slippers. There were many Spanish dancers on the floor, and all wore red slippers: the reason being, though of course mere men did not know it, that the costumers furnished such slippers to all as a part of the dress.

Shortly before midnight a Puritan maid approached the only admiral in the crowd and, plucking at his sleeve, spoke to him. Her voice was low and seemingly that of a very bitter woman.

"Listen. You don't know me, but you once did me a favor. And I just want to tell you I just overheard Chuck Lewis say Mrs. Grimshaw had promised to marry him. Chuck has a wife and baby back in the States. He deserted them. I know. He ran away with me."

"I say," Farthingham answered in surprize. "Why tell—I mean how'd you recognize me?"

The Puritan maid laughed, touched a cameo ring that he wore and then disappeared into the crowd. There were many Puritan maids, and Farthingham had not noticed that she wore any rings. So he despaired of singling her out. He couldn't remember having done any woman a favor, not any Puritan maid, anyway; but then one could never tell what a woman would consider a favor.

"Listen," said the Puritan maid a few minutes later to a stout, burly, jovial parson. "I just overheard Mrs. Grimshaw say in the dressing-room that she had promised to marry Jack Rickard. You staked me once when I needed a friend. I thought you might be interested to know that Rickard—his real name is Richards—is wanted for embezzlement back in Albany, New York. I know. I ran away with him, and he deserted me in Boston."

Behind his mask Chuck Lewis' mouth dropped in surprize. Before he could say a word the Puritan maid had flitted from view, and he really could not have told her from a half-dozen of her sisters. He might have distinguished her if he had thought to look at her feet—providing he could have seen them under the long Priscilla gown.

And then a Puritan maid, with a forwardness not strictly in keeping with her demure dress, laid an arresting hand on the arm of a slender Spanish bandit and whispered rapidly:

"Mr. Rickard, Mrs. Grimshaw has just told a friend of mine that she's going to marry Perris Farthingham. He's no more English than I am, and he's wanted for murder in New Orleans—killed a woman's husband and eloped with her. Mrs. Grimshaw ought to be warned."

"Just a minute—" said the bandit, reaching out to stop her. But the Puritan maid had gone.

He wasn't sure, but he thought that she made directly for the women's dressing-room.

Ten minutes later came the unmasking, and many of the gallants who had been escorting numerous Puritan maidens to receive coffee and cakes blushed to discover that every last one of them was a boy! But some of the men who had received confidential whisperings knew that at least one of those maids had been no boy.

The complications that might have followed her scandal-mongering were delayed by one Judge Haynes, who, having drunk a little more than was judicious, proceeded to mount on a chair and take opportunity to decry the city officials and to point out his own excellent qualities, which he was willing to place at the disposal of the city—providing the citizens signified at the polls that they wished him to serve them.

There was an instant hubbub. Other men mounted chairs and stood a little unsteadily. Sober men pleaded and reasoned; others shouted; women almost wept in their dismay that so pleasant an evening should be spoiled by a pack of politicians. Fists came into play; oaths were heard. It became a riot.

Col. Sutherland, small but erect and dignified, guided his wife and daughter toward the door with one hand and with the other led the dazed and frightened Alexina—in a most charming Spanish costume — after them. Col. Sutherland knew little of women; he tried to tell her she ought not to feel so badly about her party becoming a fiasco.

She spent the night at the boarding-house where the Sutherlands stopped, and much of the night was passed with her head on Mrs. Sutherland's knee, where Alexina was petted and consoled by one who did not try to tell her not to feel badly.

WHEN Alexina returned to her own home about noon the next day, she found two notes. One was from Perris Farthingham. It said that he understood she was "contemplating an alliance" with Mr. Chuck Lewis; and she must not think it was jealousy on his part, for, though his heart was broken, yet he wished her happiness with the man of her choice; but he had very good reason for knowing that Mr. Lewis had already deserted one woman and her child.

The other letter was from Chuck Lewis and explained that he himself had left the letter because she must get it at the earliest possible minute, and he hadn't known where to locate her. Before she married Jack Rickard she ought to know that he was an embezzler and that the woman he had skipped out with had been deserted in Boston and was now in San Francisco looking for him.

There was no letter from Jack Rickard—nor had he called that morning. So Alexina, woman-like, sent for him. But the anxious Farthingham, who had already called many times, appeared first.

"How many people have you told this to?" demanded Alexina, not at all as a doll-faced woman might be expected to demand, as she held out the letter.

Farthingham stammered a bit and was interrupted with the request that he search out each person to whom he had carried the scandal and apologize before Chuck Lewis heard of it. Farthingham began to stammer again, but she struck him dumb with:

"I was the Puritan maid. I wanted to see if you were a good loser. You're not. No gentleman would malign the character of another on the word of a strange, masked woman. Good day, Mr. Farthingham."

He was scarcely out of sight of the house before Chuck Lewis, breathless, arrived. He hoped that he was not too late.

To the inquiry as to how many people he had repeated the scandal to, Chuck vowed heartily that he hadn't breathed it to a soul but her.

"You at least are a fairly decent loser," she said, to Chuck's infinite astonishment.

And he gaped speechless as she explained. He told her pointedly, however, that he did not think it had been a fair trick. And she flared up and told him that it might not have been "fair" but it was certainly "enlightening." He departed, mumbling puzzled curses on the incomprehensibility of women.

Jack Rickard came, calm, immobile, and asked what service he could do, since the message had said her desire to see him was urgent.

"Marry me," she said abruptly with tears verging into her eyes.

He hesitated in his answer, and she asked rapidly:

"Do you love me? Have you changed? You haven't been the same since that faro game? You knew I was cheating all the time, didn't you? Tell me, didn't you?"

"It was pretty obvious," he said. "But, as for loving you—Alexina—I love you as I never loved anything upon this earth. And I've asked you so many times to marry me I began to think I never would get an answer."

"Today? Right now? I've been foolish to wait so long!"

And she buried herself in his arms and lay helpless, contented—crying, of course.

They were married within the hour, and the city buzzed with the news of it. Congratulations poured in.

That night, when they were alone, she came up to him and, looking wisely, as if bursting with something that must be said and which would be surprizing, she asked——

"Do you know why I married you, Jack?"

"I hope," he said, drawing his lips into an amused, tender smile, "it was because my charms were irresistible."

"Do be serious. But do you know what made me know that I was right in loving you?"

"I pass. I'll do what I can to keep you hoodwinked."

"Hoodwinked, indeed!" she threw at him and tapped his nose with the palm of her hand. "Listen. I was the Puritan maid last night——"

"Puritan? I thought you were a Spanish——"

"Listen. Don't interrupt. I was a Puritan maid and changed to the Spanish rig for the unmasking. I had a half-dozen boys wear Puritan costume too. I wanted to see which of you three was the best loser. The Puritan maid told Mr. Farthingham that I was going to marry Chuck——"

"You mean she told fortunes? Don't think much of her as a guesser."

"Jack, do be serious. The Puritan maid told him that Chuck had a wife and baby in the States. And she told Chuck much the same story about you."

Rickard looked at her steadily. His was the gambler's face, but there was a light of amazement in his eyes, amazement that she should have been so reckless as to tamper with such scandal.

"I knew you'd be surprized. So were they this morning when I told them. But the Puritan maid—which was this lady right here—had put them to the test. And, Jack, they came to me, whining with their scandal. They were poor losers. But you know, also, that I had told a certain Spanish bandit that Perris, who was also reported about to marry me, was wanted for murder and—and Jack, you were a good loser—a gentleman—though you thought I was going to marry him!"

Rickard was still staring at her, but there was a kind of blankness in his eyes, as if his thoughts were busy somewhere else; or maybe it was a kind of incredulous stare. Anyway, she exclaimed a bit petulantly—

"Don't you believe me?"

He nodded slowly and said:

"I believe you, all right. Yes. But you see, Alexina, there's been a mistake. A friend of mine—just my build—was dead set on that Spanish bandit dress, and at the last minute I let him have it. I wore a domino!"

For a moment Alexina seemed about to faint; a blunder had given her a husband who had evaded the test she had set for him. He stood strained, but resigned to whatever she should think of him. Then swiftly her face changed, brightened and with a cry of joy she flung herself at him, tightening her arms about his neck.

"If you had kept still," she exclaimed rapturously, almost choking him, "I would never have known—known—what a really fine, square, decent man you are! And I did want to love you best all the time. Honest, I did!"

ON THE TRAIL OF TIPPOO TIB

An Up-and-down the-Earth-Tale

A Six-Part Story. Part 1

By Talbot Mundy

Author of "Heinie Horns Into the Game," "The End of the Bad Ship Bundesrath," etc.

THIS is the sixth of a series of tales, each a complete story in itself, in which an American and three English friends endeavor to gain by any honest means a large sum of money which is particularly needed by one of them, "*Monty*" (*Lord Montdidier*). In previous stories they have fallen foul of Portuguese colonial venality, and of German political avarice. In the last story they were shipwrecked. Now—by no means destitute, but stranded and quarantined in Zanzibar, they hear the legend of Tippoo Tib's buried ivory and set off in quest of it.

Each tale is independent of all the others, but the same characters recur and pursue an unvarying goal with courage and good humor.

GREEN, oh greener than emeralds are, tree-tops beckon the *dhows* to land,
White, oh whiter than diamonds are, blue waves burst on the amber sand,
And nothing is fairer than Zanzibar from the Isles o' the West to the Marquesand.

IT WAS old when the world was wild with youth;
(All love was lawless then!)
Since 'venture's birth from ends of earth
I ha' called the sons of men,
And their women have wept the ages out
In travail sore to know
What lure of opiate art can leach
Along bare seas from reef to beach
Until from port and river reach
The fever'd captains go.

RED, oh redder than red lips are, my flowers nod in the blazing noon,
Blue, oh bluer than maidens' eyes, are the breasts o' my waves in the young monsoon,
And there are cloves to smell and musk and lemon trees and cinnamon.

* *The Njo Hapa Song, Verse* 1

ESTIMATES of ease and affluence vary with the point of view. While his elder brother lived, Monty had continued in his element, a cavalry officer, his combined income and pay ample for all that the Bombay side of India might require of an English gentleman. They say that a finer polo-player, a steadier shot on foot at tiger, or a bolder squadron leader never lived.

But to Monty's infinite disgust his brother died childless. It is divulging no secret to say that the income that passes with the title varies between five and seven thousand pounds a year, according as coal is high and tenants prosperous or not—a mere miserable pittance, of course, for the Earl of Montdidier and Kirkudbrightshire; so that all his ventures, and therefore ours, had one avowed end—shekels enough to lift the mortgages from his estates.

Five generations of soldiers had blazed the Montidier fame on battle-grounds, to a nation's—and why not the whole earth's—benefit, without replenishing the family funds, and Monty—himself a confirmed and convinced bachelor—was minded when his own time should come to pass the title along to the next in line together with sufficient funds to support its dignity.

To us—even to Yerkes, familiar with United States merchant kings—he seemed, with his thirty thousand dollars a year, already a gilded Crœsus. He had ample to travel on and finance prospecting trips. We never lacked for working capital, but the quest—and, including Yerkes, we were as keen as he—led us into strange places.

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* The words *Njo hapa* in the Kiswahili tongue are the equivalent of *Idherao* in Hindustani—i. e. "Come hither!"

So behold him—a privy councillor of England, if you please—lounging in the lazaretto of Zanzibar, clothed only in slippers, underwear and a long blue dressing-gown. We three others were dressed the same, and, because it smacked of official restraint, we objected noisily; but Monty did not seem to mind much. He was rather bored but unresentful.

A French steamer had put us ashore in quarantine with the grim word cholera against us, and, although our tale of suffering and Monty's rank insured us a friendly reception, the port health authorities elected to be strict. We were given a nice long lazy time in which to cool our heels and order new clothes. Guns, kit, tents and all but what we stood in had gone to the bottom with the German cholera-ship from whose life-boat the French had rescued us.

* * *

FOR a quarantine station in the tropics it was after all not such a bad place. We could hear the crooning of lazy rollers on the beach, and what little sea-breeze moved at all came in to us through iron-barred windows. The walls were of coral, three feet thick. So was the roof. The wet, red-tiled floor made at least an impression of coolness, and the fresh, green foliage of an enormous mango tree, while it obstructed most of the view, suggested anything but durance vile.

From not very far away the aromatic smell of a clove warehouse located us, not disagreeably, at the farther end of Sindbad's journeys, and the birds in the mango brushes cried and were colorful with hues and notes of merry extravagance. Zanzibar is no parson's paradise—nor the center of much high society. It reeks of unsavory history as well as of spices. But it has its charms, and the Arabs love it. It had Fred Oakes so interested that he had forgotten his concertina—his one possession saved from shipwreck, for which he had offered to fight the whole of Zanzibar one-handed rather than have it burned.

"Damnation. It has silver reeds—it's an English top-hole one—a wonder!"

So the doctors, who are kind men in the main, disinfected it twice, once on the French liner that picked us out of the *Bundesrath's* boat and again in Zanzibar; and, with the stench of Lord-knew-what zealous chemical upon it, he had let it lie unused while he picked up Kishwahili and talked by the hour to a toothless, wrinkled, black man with a touch of Arab in his breeding and a deal of it in his vocabulary

Presently Fred came over and joined us, dancing across the wide red floor with the skirts of his gown outspread like a ballet-dancer's—ridiculous and perfectly aware of it.

"Monty, you're rich! We're all made men! We're all rich! Let's spend money! Let's send for catalogs and order things!

"If you love the Lord, explain!" said I.

"This old one-eyed lazarett attendant is an ex-slave, ex-accomplice of Tippoo Tib!"

"And Tippoo Tib?" I asked.

"Tippoo Tib is the Arab—is, mind you, my son, not was—the Arab who was made governor of half the Congo by H. M. Stanley and the rest of 'em. Tippoo Tib is the expert who used to bring the slave caravans to Zanzibar—bring 'em, send 'em, send for 'em—he owned 'em anyway.

"Tippoo Tib was the biggest ivory-hunter and trader who ever lived since old King Solomon! Tippoo Tib is here—in Zanzibar—to all intents and purposes a prisoner on parole—old as the hills—getting ready to die—and proud as the very ace of hell. So says One-Eye!"

"So we're all rich?" suggested Monty.

"Of course we are Listen! The British Government took Tippoo's slaves away and busted his business. Made him come and live in this place, go to church on Sundays and be good. Then they asked him what he'd done with his ivory. Asked him politely after putting him through that mill! One-Eye here says Tippoo had a million tusks—a million—safely buried!

"Government offered him ten per cent. of their cash value if he'd tell 'em where, and the old sport spat in their faces! Swears he'll die with the secret! One-Eye vows Tippoo is the only one who knows. There were others, but Tippoo shot or poisoned 'em."

"So we're rich," smiled Yerkes.

"Of course we are! Consider this, America, and tell me if Standard Oil can beat it! One million tusks! One-Eye says it never paid to carry a tusk weighing less than sixty pounds. Some tusks weigh two hundred—some even more—took four men to carry some of 'em! Call it an average weight of one hundred pounds and be safe."

"Yes, let's play safe," agreed Monty seriously.

"One hundred million pounds of ivory!" said Fred, with a smack of his lips and the air of a man who could see the whole of it. "The present market price of new ivory is over ten shillings a pound on the spot. That'll all be very old stuff, worth at least double. But let's say ten shillings a pound and be on the safe side."

"Yes, let's," laughed Yerkes.

"One thousand million—a billion shillings!' Fred announced. "Fifty million pounds!"

"Two hundred and fifty million dollars!" Yerkes calculated, beginning to take serious notice.

"But how are we to find it?" I objected.

"That's the point. Government 'ud hog the lot, but it has hunted high and low and can't find it. So the offer stands ten per cent. to any one who does—ten per cent. of fifty million—lowest reckoning, mind you—five million pounds! Half for Monty—two and a half million. A million for Yerkes, a million for me, and half a million for you, all according to contract! How d'you like it?"

"Well enough," I answered. "If it's only the hundredth part true, I'm enthusiastic!"

"So—now suit yourselves!" said Fred, collapsing with a sweep of his skirts into the nearest chair. "I've told you what One-Eye says. These dusky gents sometimes exaggerate, of course——"

"Now and then," admitted Monty.

"But, where there's smoke, you mean there's prob'ly some one smoking hams?" suggested Yerkes.

"I mean, let's find that ivory!" said Fred.

"We might do worse than make an inquiry or two," Monty assented cautiously.

"Didums, you —— fool, you're growing old! You're wasting time! You're trying to damp enthusiasm! You're—you're——"

"Interested, Fred. I'm interested. Now let's——"

"Let's find that ivory, and to —— with caution! Why, man alive, it's the chance of a million lifetimes!"

"Well then," said Monty, "admitting the story's true for the sake of argument, how do you propose to get on the track of the secret?"

"Get on it? I'm on it! Didn't One-Eye say Tippoo Tib is alive and in Zanzibar? The old rascal! Many a slave he's done to death! Many a man he's tortured! I propose we catch Tippoo Tib, hide him and pull out his toe-nails one by one until he blows the gaff!"

To hear Fred talk when there is nothing to do but talk a stranger might arrive at many false conclusions.

"If there's any truth in the story at all," said Monty, "Government will have done everything within the bounds of decency to coax the facts from Tippoo Tib. I suspect we'd have to take our chance and simply hunt. But let's hear Juma's story."

So the old attendant left off sprinkling water from a yellow jar and came and stood before us. Fred's proposal of tweaking toe-nails would have not been practical in his case, for he had none left. His black legs, visible because he had tucked his one long garment up about his waist, were a mass of scars. He was lean, angular, yet peculiarly straight for his years.

As he stood before us, he let his shirt-like garment drop, and the change from scarecrow to deferential servant was instantaneous. He was so wrinkled, and the wrinkles were so deep, that one scarcely noticed his sightless eye, almost hidden among a nest of creases; and, in spite of the wrinkles, his polished, shaven head made him look ridiculously youthful, because one expected gray hair and there was none.

"Ask him how he lost his toe-nails, Fred," said I.

But the old man knew enough English to answer for himself. He made a wry grimace and showed his hands. The finger-nails were gone too.

"Tell us your story, Juma," said Monty.

"Tell 'em about the *pembe*—the ivory—the much ivory—the *meengi pembe,*" echoed Fred.

"Let's near about those nails of his first," said I.

"One thing'll prob'ly lead to another," Yerkes agreed. "Start him on the toe-nail story."

SO WE did, but it did not lead very far. Fred, who had picked up Kiswahili enough to piece out the old man's broken English, drew him out and clarified the tale. But it only went to prove that others besides ourselves had heard of Tippoo Tib's hoard. Some white man—we could not make head or tail of the name, but it sounded rather like somebody belonging to a man named Carpets—had trapped him a few years before and put him to torture in the belief that he knew the secret.

"But me not knowing nothing!" he assured us, solemnly shaking his head again and again.

But he was not in the least squeamish about telling us that Tippoo Tib had surely buried huge quantities of ivory and had caused to be slain afterward every one who shared the secret.

"How long ago?" asked Monty.

But natives of that part of the earth are poor hands at reckoning time.

"Long time," he assured us.

He might have meant six years, or sixty. It would have been all the same to him.

"No. Me not liking Tippoo Tib. One time his slave. That bad. Byumby set free. That good. Now working here. This very good."

"Where do you think the ivory is?" This from Yerkes.

But the old man shook his head.

"As I understand it," said Monty, "slaves came mostly from the Congo side of Lake Victoria Nyanza. Slave and elephant country were approximately the same as regards general direction, and there were two routes from the Congo—the southern by way of Ujiji on Tanganyika to Bagamoyo on what is now the German coast, and the other to the north of Victoria Nyanza, ending at Mombasa. Ask him, Fred, which way the ivory used to come."

"Both ways," announced Juma without waiting for Fred to interpret.

He had an uncanny trick of following conversations, his intelligence seeming to work by fits and starts.

"That gives us about half Africa for hunting-ground and a job for life!" laughed Yerkes.

"Might have a worse!" Fred answered, resentful of cold water thrown on his discovery.

"Were you Tippoo Tib's slave when he buried the ivory?" demanded Monty, and the old man nodded.

"Where were you at the time?"

Juma made a gesture intended to suggest immeasurable distances toward the west, and the name of the place he mentioned was one we had never heard of.

"How much ivory do you suppose there was?" asked Yerkes.

"*Teli, teli!*" he answered, shaking his head.

"Too much!" Fred translated.

"Pretty fair to middling vague," said Yerkes, "but," judicially, "almost worth investigating!"

"Investigating?" Fred sprang from his chair. "It's better than all King Solomon's mines, El Dorado, Golconda and *Sindbad the Sailor's* treasure-lands rolled in one! It's an obvious good thing! All we need is a bit of luck and the ivory's ours!"

"I'll sell you my share now for a thousand dollars — come — come across!" grinned Yerkes.

There was a rough-house after that, he and Fred nearly pulled the old attendant in two, each claiming the right to torture him first and learn the secret. They ended up without a whole rag between them and had to send Juma to headquarters for new blue dressing-gowns. The doctor came himself—a fat, good-natured party with an eye-glass and a cocktail appetite, acting *locum tenens* for the real official, who was home on leave. He brought the ingredients for cocktails with him.

"Yes," he said, shaking the mixer with a sort of deft solicitude. "There's more than something in the tale. I've had a try myself to get details. Tippoo Tib believes in up-to-date physic, and, when the old rascal's sick, he sends for me. I offered to mix him an elixir of life that would make him outlive Methuselah if he'd give me as much as a hint of the direction of his cache."

"He ought to have fallen for that," said Yerkes, but the doctor shook his head.

"He's an Arab. They're Shia Mohammedans. Their paradise is a pleasant place, from all accounts. He advised me to drink my own elixir and have lots and lots of years in which to find the ivory without being beholden to him for help. Wily old scaramouch! But I had a better card up my sleeve. He has taken to discarding ancient prejudices—doesn't drink or anything like that, but treats his harem almost humanely. Lets 'em have anything that costs him nothing. Even sends for a medico when they're sick!

"Getting lax in his old age! Sent for me a while ago to attend his favorite wife—sixty years old if she's a day and as proud of him as if he were the King of Jerusalem. Well—I looked her over, judged she was likely to keep her bed and did some thinking.

"You know their religious law? A woman can't go to paradise without special intercesssion, mainly vicarious. I found a mollah—that's a Mohammedan priest—who'd do anything for half of nothing. They most of them will. I gave him fifty *dibs* and promised him more if the trick worked. Then I told the old woman she was going to die, but that, if she'd tell me the secret of Tippoo Tib's ivory, I had a mollah handy who would pass her into paradise ahead of her old man. What did she do? She called Tippoo Tib, and he turned me out of the house. So I'm fifty out of pocket. What's worse, the old girl didn't die—got right up out of bed and stayed up! My rep's all smashed to pieces among the Arabs!"

"D'you suppose the old woman knew the secret?" I asked.

"Not she! If she'd known it she'd have split! The one ambition she has left is to be with Tippoo Tib in paradise. But he can intercede for her and get her in—provided he feels that way; so she rounded on me in the hope of winning his special favor and getting to heaven! But the old ruffian knows better than that! He'll no more pray for her than tell me where the ivory is! The koran tells him there are much better houris in paradise; so why trouble to take along a toothless favorite from this world?"

"Has the Government any official information?" asked Monty.

"Quite a bit, I'm told. Official records of vain searches. Between you and me and these four walls, about the only reason why they didn't hang the old slave-driving murderer was that they've always hoped he'd divulge the secret some day. But he hates the men who broke him far too bitterly to enrich them on any terms! If any man wins the secret from him, it'll be a foreigner. They tell me a German had a hard try. One of Karl Peters' men."

"That'll be Carpets!" said Monty. "Somebody belonging to Carpets—Karl Peters."

"The man's serving a life sentence in the jail for torturing our friend Juma here."

We all looked at Juma with a new respect.

"I got Juma this job in here," said the doctor. "I've rather the notion of getting my ten per cent. on the value of that ivory some day!"

"Are there any people after it just now?" asked Monty.

"I don't know, I'm sure. There was a German named Schillingschen who spent a month in Zanzibar and talked a lot with Tippoo Tib. The old rascal might tell his secret to any one he thought was England's really dangerous enemy. Schillingschen crossed over to British East, if I remember rightly. He might be on the track of it."

"Tell us more about Schillingschen," said Monty.

"He's one of those Orientalists who profess to know more about Islam than Christianity—more about Africa and Arabia than Europe—more about the occult than what's in the open. A man with a shovel beard, stout, thick-set; he talks Kiswahili and Arabic and half a dozen other languages better than the natives do themselves. Has money—outfit like a prince's—everything imaginable: rifles, microscopes, cigars, wine.

"He didn't make himself agreeable here—except to the Arabs. Didn't call at the residence."

"Fred," said Monty, as soon as the doctor had left the room, "I'm tempted by this ivory of yours."

But Fred, in the new blue dressing-gown the doctor had brought, was in another world, a land of trope and key and metaphor. For the last ten minutes he had kept a stub of pencil and a scrap of paper working, and now the strident tones of his too-long-neglected concertina stirred the heavy air and shocked the birds outside to silence.

The instrument was wheezy, for, in addition to the sacrilege the port authorities had done by way of disinfection, the bellows had been wetted when Fred plunged from the sinking *Bundesrath* and swam. But he is not what you could call particular as long as a good loud noise comes forth that can be jerked and broken into anything resembling tune.

"Tempted, are you?" he laughed. He looked like a drunken troubadour *en deshabille*, with those up-brushed mustaches and his usually neat brown beard all spread awry. "Temptation's more fun than plunder!"

Yerkes threw an orange at him, more by way of recognition than remonstrance. We had not heard Fred sing since he tried to charm cholera victims in the *Bundesrath's* fo'castle, and, like the rest of us, he had his rights. He sang with legs spread wide in front of him and head thrown back, and each time he reached the chorus he kept on repeating it until we joined in.

There's a prize that's full familiar from Zanzibar to France;
From Tokio to Boston; we are paid it in advance.
It's the wages of adventure, and the wide world knows the feel
Of the stuff that stirs good huntsmen all and brings the hounds to heel!
It's the one reward that's gratis and precedes the toilsome task—
It's the one thing always better than an optimist can ask!
It's amusing; it's amazing, and it's never twice the same;
It's the salt of true adventure and the glamour of the game!

Chorus—It is tem-tem-pi-tation!
The one sublime sensation!
You may doubt it, but without it
There would be no derring do!
The reward the temptee cashes
Is too often dust and ashes,
But you'll need no spurs or lashes
When temptation beckons you!

Oh, it drew the Roman legions to old Britain's distant isle,
And it beckoned H. M. Stanley to the sources of the Nile;
It's the one and only reason for the bristling guns at Gib,
For the skeletons at Khartoum and the crimes of Tippoo Tib.
The gentlemen adventurers braved torture for its sake,
It beckoned out the galleons and filled the hulls of Drake!
Oh, it sets the sails of commerce, and it whets the edge of war;
It's the sole excuse for churches and the only cause of law!

Chorus—It is tem-tem-pi-tation!
Etc., etc.

No note is there of failure—that's a tune the croakers sing!
This song's of youth and strength and health and time that's on the wing!
Of wealth beyond the hazy blue of far horizons flung—
But never of the folk returning, disillusioned, stung!
It's a tale of gold and ivory, of plunder out of reach,
Of luck that fell to other men, of treasure on the beach—
A compound cross-reciprocating, two-way, double spell,
The low, sweet lure to heaven and the tallyho to hell!

Chorus—It is tem-tem-pi-tation!
The one sublime sensation!
You may doubt it, but without it
There would be no derring do!
It's the siren of tomorrow
That knows naught of lack or sorrow;
So you'll sell your bonds and borrow,
When temptation beckons you!

Once Fred starts there is no stopping him, short of personal violence. He ran through his ever-lengthening list of songs, not all quite printable, until the very coral walls ached with the concertina's wailing, and our throats were hoarse from ridiculous choruses.

I went to the window and tried to get a view of shipping through the mango branches. But all I could see was a low wall beyond the little compound and, over the top of it, head-gear of nearly all the kinds there are. Zanzibar is a wonderful market for second-hand clothes. There was even a tall silk hat of not very ancient pattern.

"Come and look, Monty!" said I, and he and Yerkes came and stood beside me.

Seeing his troubador charm was broken, Fred snapped the catch on the concertina and came, too.

"'Arabian Nights'!" he exclaimed, thumping Monty on the back. "Didums, you drunkard, we're dead and in another world! Juma is the one-eyed *Calender!* Look—fishermen—houris—how many houris? See 'em grin! Soldiers of fortune—merchants—sailors—by gad, there's *Sindbad* himself! And say! If that isn't the *Sultan Haroun al Raschid* in disguise I'm willing to eat beans and pie for breakfast to oblige Yerkes! Look—look at the fat ruffian's stomach and swagger, will you!"

Yerkes sized up the situation quickest. "Sing him another song, Fred. If we want to strike up acquaintance with half Zanzibar, here's our chance!"

"O Richard, O my king!" hummed Monty. "It's Cœur de Lion and Blondell over again with the harp reversed."

IF ZANZIBAR may be said to possess main thoroughfares, that window of ours commanded as much of one as the tree and wall permitted, and music, even of a concertina, is the key to the heart of all people whose hair is crisp and kinky. Perhaps owing rather to the generosity of their slave law and Koran teachings than to racial depravity, there are not very many Arabs left in that part of the world with true Semitic features and straight hair, nor many woolly-headed folk who are quite all-Bantu. There is enough Arab blood in all of them to make them bold; Bantu enough for syncopated, ragtime music to take them by the toes and stir them.

The crowd in the street grew and gathered until a policeman in red fez and khaki knickerbockers came and started trouble. He had a three-cornered fight on his hands and no sympathy from any one within two minutes. Then the man with the stomach and swagger—he whom Fred called *Haroun al Raschid*—took a hand in masterly style. He seized the policeman from behind and flung him out of the crowd; nobody was troubled any more by that official.

"That him Tippoo Tib's nephew!" said a voice, and we all jumped. We had not noticed Juma come and stand between us.

"I suspect nephew is a vague relationship in these parts," said Monty. "Do you mean Tippoo's brother was that man's father, Juma?"

"No, *Bwana.** Tippoo Tib bringing slave long ago f'm Bagamoyo. Him she-slave having chile. She becoming concubine Tippoo Tib his wife's brother. That chile Tippoo Tib's nephew. Tea ready, *Bwana.*"

"What does that man do for a living?"

"Do for a living?" Juma was bewildered.

"What does he work at?"

"Not working."

"Never?"

"No."

"Has he private means, then?"

"I not understand. Tea ready, *Bwana.*"

"Has he got *mali***?*" Fred demanded.

"*Mali?* No. Him poor man."

"Then how does he exist, if he has no *mali* and doesn't work?"

"Oh, one wife here, one there, one other place, an' Tippoo Tib byumby him giving food."

"How many wives has he?"

"Tea ready, *Bwana!*"

"How do they come to be spread all over the place?"

We were shooting questions at him one after the other, and Juma began to look as if he would have preferred a repetition of the toe-nail incident.

"Oh, he travel much an' byumby lose all money; then he stay here. Tea, him growing cold."

There is no persuading the native servant who has lived under the Union Jack that an Englishman does not need hot tea at frequent intervals, even after three cocktails in an afternoon. So we trooped to the table to oblige him and went through the form of being much refreshed.

"What is that man's name?" demanded Monty.

"Hassan."

"Tell him to come and talk with us at the hotel as soon as he hears we are out of this."

We did not know it at the time, for I don't think that Monty guessed it either, that we had taken the surest way of setting all Zanzibar by the ears. In that last, lingering stronghold of legal slavery,* where the only stories judged worth listening to are the very sources of the "Thousand Nights and a Night," intrigue is not perhaps the breath of life, but it is the salt and savor. There is a woolly-headed sultan, who draws a guaranteed, fixed income and has nothing better to do than regale himself and a harem with Western alleged amusement. There are police and lights and municipal regulations.

In fact, Zanzibar has come on miserable times from certain points of view. But there remains the fun of listening to all the rumors borne by sea.

"Play on the flute in Zanzibar and Africa as far as the lakes will dance!" the Arabs say, and the gentry who once drove slaves or traded ivory refuse to believe that the day of lawlessness is gone forever.

One rumor, then, is worth ten facts. Four white men, singing behind the bars of the lazaretto, desiring to speak with Hassan, "nephew" of Tippoo Tib, were enough to send whispers sizzling up and down all the mazy streets.

Our release from quarantine took place next day, and we went to the hotel, where we were beseiged at once by tradesmen, each proclaiming himself the only honest outfitter and "agent for all good export firms." Monty departed to call on British officialdom—one advantage of traveling with a nobleman being that he has to do the stilted social stuff.

Yerkes went to call on the United States consul, the same being presumably a part of his religion, for he always does it and almost always abuses his Government afterward. So Fred and I were left to repel boarders, and it came about that we two received Hassan.

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* Bwana—Kiswahili word, meaning master.

** Mali—Kiswahili word, meaning possessions, property.

* Slavery was not absolutely and finally abolished in Zanzibar until 1906, during which year even the old slaves, hitherto unwilling to be set free, had to be pensioned off.

He entered our room with a great shout of "*Hodi!*"—and Fred knew enough to say "*Karibu!*"—a smart red fez set at an angle on his shaven head, his henna-stained beard all newly combed, a garment like a night-shirt reaching nearly to his heels, a sort of vest of silk embroidery restraining his stomach's tendency to wobble at will, and a fat smile decorating the least ashamed—most obviously opportunist—face I ever saw even on a black man.

"*Jambo, jambo!*" he announced, striding in and observing our lack of worldly goods with one sweep of the eye.

We had not stocked up yet with new things, and probably he did not know our old ones were at the bottom of the sea. He was a lion-hearted rascal, though, at all events at the first rush, for poverty on the surface did not trouble him.

"You send for me? You want a good guide?"

The Haroun al Raschid look had disappeared. Now he was the jack-of-all-trades, wondering which end of the jack to push in first.

"When I need a guide, I'll get a licensed one," said Fred, sitting down and turning partly away from him. It never pays to let those gentry think they have impressed you. "What is your business, Johnson?"

"My name Hassan, sah. You send for me? You want a head man? I'm formerly head man for Tippoo Tib, knowing all roads, and how to manage *wapagazi*,* *safari*,** all things!"

"Any papers to prove it?" asked Fred.

"No, sir. Reference to Tippoo Tib himself sufficient! He my part-uncle."

"Ready to tell any kind of lie for you, eh?"

"No, sir—always telling truth! You got a cook yet?"

"Can you cook?" Fred coped guardedly.

"Yes, sah. Was cook formerly for Master Stanley, go with him on expedition. Later his head man. You want to go on expedition, I getting you good cook. Where you want to go?"

"Are you looking for a job?" asked Fred.

"What you after? Ivory?"

"Maybe."

"I know all about ivory—I shoot, trade ivory along o' Tippoo Tib an' Stanley. You engage my services, all very well."

"Go and tell Tippoo Tib we want to see him. If he confirms what you say, perhaps we'll take you on," said Fred.

"Tell Tippoo Tib? Ha-ha! You want to find his buried ivory—that it? All white men wanting that! All right, I go tell him! I come again!"

"Let's go and look at the bazaar," Fred proposed.

But, in order to look, one had to reach. We left the great, heavy-beamed hotel that had once been Tippoo Tib's residence but were stopped in the outer doorway by a crowd of native boys, each with a brass plate on his arm.

"Guide, sah! Guide, sah! My name McPhairson, sah! My name Jones, sah! My name Johnson, sah! Guide to all the sights, sah!"

THEY were as persistent and evilly-intentioned as a swarm of flies and bold enough to strike back when anybody kicked them. While we wrestled and swore but made no headway, we were accosted by a Greek, who seemed from long experience able to pass through them without striking or being struck. We were not left in doubt another second as to whether our friend Hassan had dallied on the way and held his tongue or not.

"Good day, gentlemen! I hear you are fishing for information, eh? Ha-hah!"

He turned on the swarm of boys, who still yelled and struggled about our legs.

"*Imshi!** *Voetsak!*** *Enenda Zako!**** *Kuma nina, wewe!*****" In a minute he had them all scattering, for only innocence and inexperience attract the preying youth of Zanzibar. "Now, gentlemen, my name is Coutlass—Georges Coutlass. Have a drink with me, and let me tell you something."

He was tall, dark-skinned, athletic and roguish-looking even for the brand of Greek one meets with south of the Levant—dressed in khaki, with an American cowboy hat—his fingers nearly black with cigaret juice—his hands unusually horny for that climate—and his hair clipped so short that it showed the bumps of avarice and other things said to reside below the hat-band to the rear.

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* *Wapagazi*—plural of *pagazi*, porter.

** *Safari*—journey, and, by inference, outfit for a journey.

* *Imshi*—Arabic—Get to —— out of here!

** *Voetsak*—Cape Dutch—ditto.

*** *Enenda zako*—Kiswahili—ditto.

**** *Kuma nina*—Kiswahili. An opprobrious and perhaps the commonest expletive in the language, amounting to a request for details of the objurgee's female ancestry. By no means for use in drawing-rooms.

Yet a plausible, companionable-seeming man, and Zanzibar confers democratic privilege as well as fevers; impartiality hovers in the atmosphere as well as smells. So we neither of us dreamed of hesitating but followed him back into the bar, a wide, low-ceiled room whose beams were two feet thick of blackened, polished hardwood. There we sat, one each side of him in cane armchairs. He ordered the drinks and paid for them.

"First I will tell you who I am," he said, when he had swallowed a foot-long whisky peg and wiped his lips with his coat sleeve. "I never boast. I don't need to! I am Georges Coutlass! I learned that you have an English lord among your party and said I to myself, 'Aha! There is a man who will appreciate me, who am citizen of three lands!' Which of you gentlemen is the lord?"

"How can you be citizen of three countries?" Fred countered.

"Of Greece, for I was born in Greece. I have fought Turks. Ah! I have bled for Greece. I have spilt my blood in many lands, but the best was for my motherland! Of England, for I became naturalized. By bleeding-hell-and-Waterloo, but I admire the English! They have guts, those English, and I am one of them! By the great hornspoon, yes; I became an Englishman at Bow Street one Monday morning, price five pounds. I was lined up with the drunks and pickpockets, and, by ——, the magistrate mistook me for a thief!

"He would have given me six months without the option in another minute, but I had the good luck to remember how much money I had paid my witnesses. The thought of paying that for nothing—worse than nothing, for six months in jail—in an English jail — pick oakum — eat skilly—that thought brought me to my senses. 'By ——,' I said, 'I may be mad, but I'm sober! If it's a crime to desire to be English, then punish me, but let me first commit the offense!' So he laughed and didn't question my witnesses very carefully—one was a Jew, the other an ex-German, and either of them would swear to anything at half price for a quantity—and they kissed the Book and committed perjury—and, lo and behold, I was English as you are—English without troubling a midwife or the parson.

"Five pounds for the 'beak' at Bow Street—fifty for the witnesses—fifty-five all told—and cheap at the price! I had money in those days. It was after our short war with Turkey. We Greeks got beaten, but the Turks did not get all the loot! By ——, no! When our men ran before a battle, I did not run—not I! I remained, and, by ——, I grew richer in an hour than I have ever been since!"

"That's two countries," said I. "Which is the third that has the honor to claim your allegiance?"

"Honor is right!" he answered with a proud smile. "I, Georges Coutlass, have honored three flags! I am a credit to all three countries! The third is America—the U. S. A. You might say that is the corollary of being English, the natural, logical, correct sequence! The United States laws are strict, but their politics were devised for—what is it the preachers call it—ah yes, for straining at gnats and swallowing camels. By ——, they would swallow a house on fire! There was a Federal election shortly due. One of the parties—Democratic—Republican — I forget which — maybe both—needed new voters.

"The law says it takes five years to become a citizen. Politics said fifteen minutes! The politicians paid the fees, too! I was a citizen, a voter, an elector of Presidents, before I had been ashore three months, and I had sold my vote three times over within a month of that! They had me registered under three names in three separate wards! I didn't need the money—I had plenty in those days—I gave the six dollars I received for my votes to the holy church and voted the other way to save my conscience; but the fun of the thing appealed!

"By gassharraminy! I can't take life the way the copy-books lay down! I have to break laws or else break heads! But I love America! I fought and bled for America! By ——, I fought those Spaniards until I don't doubt they wished I had stayed in Greece! Yes, I left that middle finger in Cuba—shot through the left hand by a don, by ——! When I came out of hospital—and I never saw anything worse than that hot hell—I got myself attached to the commissariat, and the pickings were none so bad. Had to hand over too much, though.

"That is the worst of America, there is no genuine liberty. You have to steal for the man higher up. If you keep more than ten per cent., he squeals. He has to pass most of it on again to some one else, and so on. And they all land in jail in course of time! Give me a country where a man can keep what he finds! There was talk about congressional inquiries. Then a friend of mine, a Greek who had been out here, told me of Tippoo Tib's ivory, and it looked all right to me to change scenes for a while. I had citizenship papers—U. S. and English—and a Greek passport in case of accident. Traveling looked good to me."

"If you traveled on a Greek passport you couldn't use citizenship papers of any other country," Fred objected.

"Who said I traveled on a Greek passport? Do you take me for such a fool? Who listens to a Greek consul? He may protest and accept fees, but Greece is a little country, and no one listens to her consuls. I carry a Greek passport in case I should find somewhere some day a Greek consul with influence—or a Greek whom I wish to convince. I traveled to South Africa as an American.

"I went to Cape Town with the idea of going to Salisbury and working my way up from there as a trader into the Congo.

"I reached Johannesburg, and there I did a little I. D. B. and one thing and another until the Boer War came. Then I fought for the Boers. Yes, I have bled for the Boer cause. It was a —— bad cause! They robbed me of nearly all my money! They left me to die when I was wounded! It was only by the grace of God and the intrigues of a woman that I made my way to Lourenço Marques. No, the war was not over, but what did I care? I, Georges Coutlass, had had enough of it! I recompensed myself *en route*. I do not fight for a bunch of thieves for nothing!

"I sailed from Lourenço Marques to Mombasa. I hunted elephant in British East until they posted a reward for me on the telegraph poles. The law says not more than two elephants in one year. I shot two hundred! I sold the ivory to an Indian, bought cattle and went down into German East. The Masai attacked me, stole some of the cattle and killed others. The Germans, —— them, took the rest!

"They accused me of crimes—me, Georges Coutlass—and imposed fines calculated carefully to skin me of all I had! Roup and rotten livers, but I will knock them head-over-halleluja one fine day! Not for nothing shall they flim-flam Georges Coutlass! Which of you gentlemen is the lord?"

WE BOUGHT him another drink and watched it disappear with one uninterrupted gurgle down its appointed course.

"What did you do next?" Fred asked him before he had recovered breath enough to question us. "I suppose the Germans had you at a loose end?"

"Do you think that? Sacred history of hell! It takes more than a lousy military German to get Georges Coutlass at a loose end! They must get me dead before that can happen! And then, by *Blitzen*, as those devils say, a dead Georges Coutlass will be better than a thousand dead Germans! In hell I will use them to clean my boots on! At a loose end, was I?

"I met this —— rogue, Hassan—the fat blackguard who told me you have come to Zanzibar—and made an agreement with him to look for Tippoo Tib's buried ivory. Yes, sir! I showed him papers. He thought they were money drafts. He thought me a man of means whom he could bleed. I had guns and ammunition; he none. He pretended to know where some of Tippoo Tib's ivory is buried."

"Some of it, eh?" said Fred.

"Some of it, d'you say?" said I.

"Some of it, yes. A million tusks! Some say two million! Some say three! God—you take a hundred good tusks and bury them; you'll see the hill you've made from five miles off! A hundred thousand tusks would make a mountain! If any one buried a million tusks in one spot they'd mark the place on maps as a watershed! They must be buried here, there, everywhere along the trail of Tippoo Tib—perhaps a thousand in one place at the most. Which of you two gentlemen is the lord?"

"Did Hassan lead you to any of it?" Fred inquired.

"Not he! The jelly-belly! The Arab pig! He led me to Ujiji—that's on Lake Tanganyika—the old slave-market where he himself was once sold for ten cents. I don't doubt a piece of betel nut and a pair of worn-out shoes had to be thrown in with him at the price! There he tried to make me pay the expenses in advance of a trip to Usumbora at the head of the lake. God knows what it would have cost—the way he wanted me to do it! Are you the lord, sir?"

"What did you do?" asked Fred.

"Do? I parted company! I had made him drunk once. The Arabs aren't supposed to drink; so, when they do, they get talkative and lively! And I knew Arabic before ever I crossed the Atlantic—learned it in Egypt—ran away from a sponge-fishing boat when I was a boy. No, they don't fish sponges off the Nile delta, but you can smuggle in a sponge-boat better than in most ships. Anyhow, I learned Arabic. So I understood what that pig, Hassan, said when he talked in the dark with his brother swine. He knew no more than I where the ivory was!

"He suspected most of it was in a country called Ruanda that runs pretty much parallel with the Congo border to the west of Victoria Nyanza in German East, and he was counting on finding natives who could tell him this and that that might put him on the trail of it! I could beat that game! I could cross-examine fool natives twice as well as any fat rascal of an ex-slave! Seeing he had paid all expenses so far, however, I was not much to the bad; so I picked a quarrel with him, and we parted company. Wouldn't you have done the same, my lord?"

But Fred did not walk into the trap.

"What did you do next?" he asked.

"Next? I got a job with the agent of an Italian firm to go north and buy skins. He made me a good advance of trade goods—*melikani*,* beads, iron and brass wire, *kangas*** and all that sort of thing, and I did well. Made money on that trip. Traveled north until I reached Ruanda, went on until I could see the Fire Mountains in the distance and the country all smothered in lava. Reached a cannibal country where the devils had eaten all the surrounding tribes until they had to take to vegetarianism at last."

"But did you find the ivory?" Fred insisted.

"No, or by ——, I wouldn't be here! If I'd found it, I'd have settled down with a wife in Greece long ago. I'd be keeping an inn and growing wine and living like a gentleman! But I found out enough to know there's a system that goes with the ivory Tippoo Tib buried. If you found one lot, that would lead you to the next, and so on. I got a suspicion where one lot is, although I couldn't prove it. And I made up my mind that the German Government knows —— well where a lot of it is!"

"Then why don't the Germans dig it up?" demanded Fred.

"Aha!" laughed Coutlass. "If I know, why should I tell? If they know, why should they tell? Suppose that some of it were in Congo territory and some in British East? Suppose they should want to get the lot? What then? If they uncovered their bit in German East mightn't that put the Congo people and the British on the trail?"

"If they know where it is," said I, "they certainly guard it."

"Which of you is the lord?" demanded Coutlass earnestly.

"What do you suppose Hassan is doing, then, here in Zanzibar?" asked Fred.

"Rum and eggs! I know what he is doing! When I snapped my thumb under his fat nose and told him about the habits of his female ancestors, he went to the Germans and informed against me! The sneak-thief! The turncoat! The maggot! I shall not forget! I, Georges Coutlass, forget nothing! He informed against me, and they set *askaris** on my trail, who prevented me from making further search. I had to sit idle in Usumbora or Ujiji, or else come away; and idleness ill suits my blood! I came here, and Hassan followed.

"The Germans made a regular, salaried spy of him—the semi-Arab rat! The one-tenth Arab, nine-tenths mud-rat! Here he stays in Zanzibar and spies on Tippoo Tib, on me, on the British Government and on every stranger who comes here. His information goes to the Germans. I know, for I intercepted some of it! He writes it out in Arabic and, provided no woman goes through the folds of his clothes or feels under that silken belly-piece he wears, the Germans get it. But, if a woman does, and she's a friend of mine, that's different! Are you the lord, sir?"

"What do you propose?" asked Fred.

"Help me find that ivory!" said Coutlass. "I have very little money left, but I have guns and courage. I know where to look, and I am not afraid. No German can scare me! I am English — American—Greek! Better than any hundred Germans! Let us find the ivory and share it! Let us get it out through British territory or the Congo so that no German sausage can interfere with us or take away one tusk! Gee-rusalem, how I hate the swine! Let us put one over on them!

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* *Melikani*—the unbleached calico made in America that is the most useful trade goods from sea to sea of Central Africa.

** *Kangas*—cotton piece goods.

* *Askari*—native soldier.

"Let us get the ivory to Europe and then flaunt the deed under their noses! Let us send one little tip of a female tusk to the Kaiser for a souvenir—female* in proof it is all illegitimate, illegal, outlawed! Let us send him a piece of ivory and a letter telling him what we think of him and his swine-officials! His lieutenants and his captains! Let us smuggle the ivory out through the Congo—it can be done! It can be done! I, Georges Coutlass, will find the ivory, and find the way!"

"No need to smuggle it out," said Fred. "The British Government will give us ten per cent., or so I understand, of the value of any of it we find in British East."

Georges Coutlass threw back his head and roared with laughter, slapped his thighs, held his sides—then coughed for two or three minutes and spat blood.

"You are the lord, all right!" he gasped as soon as he could get breath. "No need to smuggle it! Ha-ha! May I be ——! Ten per cent. they'll give us! Ha-ha! Generous, by ——. They're lucky if we give them five per cent. I'd like to see any Government take away from Georges Coutlass ninety per cent. of anything without a fight! No, gentlemen. No, my lord. The Belgian Congo Government is corrupt.

"Let us spend twenty-five per cent.—even thirty—forty—fifty per cent.—of the value of it to bribe the Congo officials. Hand over ninety per cent. to the Germans or the British without a fight? Never! Never while my name is Georges Coutlass! I have fought too often. I have been robbed by Governments too often. This last time I will put it over all the Governments and be rich and go home to Greece to live like a gentleman. Believe me!"

He patted himself on the breast, and, if flashing eye and frothing lip went for anything, then all the Governments were as good as defeated already.

"You are the lord, are you not?" he demanded, looking straight at Fred.

"My name is Oakes," Fred answered.

"Oh, then you? I beg pardon!"

He looked at me with surprize that he made no attempt to conceal. Fred could pass for a king with that pointed beard of his—provided he were behaving himself seemly at the time—but for all my staid demeanor I have never been mistaken for any kind of personage. I disillusioned Coutlass promptly.

"Then you are neither of you lords?"

"Pish! We're obviously ladies!" answered Fred.

"Then you have fooled me?" The Greek rose to his feet. "You have deceived me? You have accepted my hospitality and confidence under false pretense?"

I THINK there would have been a fight, for Fred was never the man to accept brow-beating from chance-met strangers, and the Greek's fiery eye was rolling in fine frenzy; but just at that moment Yerkes strolled in, cheerful and brisk.

"Hullo, fellers! This is some thirsty burg. Do they sell soft drinks in this joint?" he inquired.

"By ——!" exclaimed Coutlass. "An American! I, too, am an American! Fellow citizen, these men have treated me badly! They have tricked me!"

"You must be dead easy!" said Yerkes genially. "If those two wanted to live at the con game, they'd have to practise on the junior kindergarten grades. They're the mildest men I know. I let that one with the beard hold my shirt and pants when I go swimming! Tricked you, have they? Say—have you got any money left?"

"Oh, have a drink!" laughed the Greek. "Have one on me! It's good to hear you talk!"

"What have my friends done to you?" asked Yerkes.

"I was looking for a lord. They pretended to be lords."

"What? Both of 'em?"

"No, it is one lord I am looking for."

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism!" said Yerkes profanely. "And you found two? What's your worry? I'll pretend to be a third if that'll help you any!"

"Gentlemen," said the Greek, rising to his full height and letting his rage begin to gather again, "you play with me. That is not well! You waste my time. That is not wise! I come in all innocence, looking for a certain lord—a real, genuine lord—the

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* Under international agreement, all female ivory is confiscated on sight by Government.

Earl of Montdidier and Kirscrubbrightshaw—my ——, what a name!"

"I'm Mundidger," said a level voice, and the Greek faced about like a man attacked.

Monty had entered the barroom and stood listening with calm amusement that for some strange reason exasperated the Greek less than our attitude had done, at least for the moment. When the first flush of surprize had died, he grinned and grew gallant.

"My own name is Georges Coutlass, my lord!" He made a sweeping bow, almost touching the floor with the brim of his cowboy hat and then crossing his breast with it.

"What can I do for you?" asked Monty.

"Listen to me!"

"Very well. I can spare fifteen minutes."

We all took seats together in a far corner of the dingy room, where the Syrian barkeeper could not overhear us.

"My lord, I am an Englishman!" Coutlass began. "I am a God-fearing, law-abiding gentleman! I know where to look for the ivory that the Arab villain, Tippoo Tib, has buried! I know how to smuggle it out of Africa without paying a penny of duty——"

"Did you say law-abiding?" Monty asked.

"Surely! Always! I never break the law. As for instance—in Greece, where I had the honor to be born, the law says no man shall carry a knife or wear one in his belt. So, since I was a little boy I carry none. I have none in my hand—none at my belt. I keep it here!"

He stooped, raised his right trouser-leg and drew from his Wellington boot a two-edged, pointed thing almost long enough to merit the name of rapier. He tossed it in the air, let it spin six or seven times, end over end, caught it deftly by the point and returned it to its hiding-place.

"I am a law-abiding man," he said, "but where the law leaves off, I know where to begin! I am no fool!"

Monty made up his mind there and then that this man's game would not be worth the candle.

"No, Mr. Coutlass, I can't oblige you," he said.

The Greek half-arose and then sat down again.

"You can not find it without my assistance!" he said, wrinkling his face for emphasis.

"I'm not looking for assistance," said Monty.

"Aha! You play with words. You are not—but you will! I am no fool, my lord. I understand. Not for nothing did I make a friend again of that pig, Hassan. Not for nothing have I waited all these months in this stinking Zanzibar until a man whom I could trust should come in search of that ivory. Not for nothing did Juma, the lazaretto attendant, tell Hassan you desired to see him. You seek the ivory, but you wish to keep it all! To share none of it with me!" He stood up and made another bow, much curter than his former one. "I am Georges Coutlass! My courage is known! No man can rob me and get away with it!"

"My good man," drawled Monty, raising his eyebrows in the comfortless way he has when there seems need of facing an inferior antagonist. He hates to "lord it" as thoroughly as he loves to risk his neck. "I would not rob you if you owned the earth! If you have valuable information I'll pay for it cheerfully after it's tested."

"Ah! Now you talk!"

"Observe—I said, after it's tested!"

"I don't think he knows anything," said Fred. "I think he guessed a lot and wants to look but can't afford to pay his own expenses. Isn't that it?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Coutlass.

"I can't talk Greek," said Fred. "Shall I say it again in English?"

"You may name any reasonable price," said Monty, "for real information. Put it in writing. When we're agreed on the price, put that in writing too. Then, if we find the information is even approximately right, why, we'll pay for it."

"Ah-h-h! You intend to play a trick on me! You use my information! You find the ivory! You go out by the Congo River and the other coast, and I kiss myself good-by to you and ivory and money! I am to be what d'you call it—a milk pigeon?"

"Being that must be some sensation!" nodded Yerkes.

"I warn you I can not be tampered with!" snarled the Greek, putting on his hat with a flourish. "I leave you, for you to think it over. But I tell you this—I promise you—I swear: any expedition in search of that ivory that does not include Georges Coutlass on his own terms is a delusion—a busted flush—smashed—exploded—pfff! So—evanesced before the start! My address is Zanzibar. Every street child knows me. When you wish to know my terms, tell the first man or child you meet to lead you to the house where Georges Coutlass lives! Good morning, Lord Skirtsshubrish! We will no doubt meet again!"

He turned his back on us and strode from the room, a man out of the middle ages, soldierly of bearing, unquestionably bold, and not one bit more venial or lawless than ninety per cent. of history's gallants, if the truth were told.

"Let's hope that's the last of him!" said Monty.

"Last of him be sugared!" said Yerkes. "That's only the first of him! He'll find seven devils worse than himself and camp on our trail, if I know anything of Greeks—that's to say, if our trail leads after that ivory. Does it?"

"Depends," said Monty. "Let's talk up-stairs. That Syrian has long ears."

SO WE trooped to Monty's room, where the very cobwebs reeked of Arab history and lawless plans. He sat on the black iron bed, and we grouped ourselves about on chairs that had very likely covered the known world between them. One was obviously jetsam from a steamship; one was a Chinese thing, carved with staggering dragons; the other was made of iron-hard wood that Yerkes swore came from South America.

"Shoot when you're ready!" grinned Yerkes.

I was too excited to sit still. So was Fred.

"Get a move on, Didums, for God's sake!" he growled.

"Well," said Monty, "there seems something in this ivory business. Our chance ought to be as good as anybody's. But there are one or two stiff hurdles. In the first place, the story is common property. Every one knows it: Arabs, Swahili, Greeks, Germans, English. To be suspected of looking for it would spell failure, for the simple reason that every adventurer on the coast would trail us, and if we did find it we wouldn't be able to keep the secret for five minutes. If we found it anywhere except on British territory, it 'ud be taken away from us before we'd time to turn round. And it isn't buried on British territory! I've found out that much."

"Good God, Didums! D'you mean you know where the stuff is?"

Fred sat forward like a man at a play.

"I know where it isn't," said Monty. "They told me at the residency that in all human probability it's buried part in German East, and by far the greater part is in the Congo!"

"Then that ten per cent. offer by the British is a bluff?" asked Yerkes.

"Out of date," said Monty. "The other Governments offer nothing. The German Government might make terms with a German or a Greek—not with an Englishman. The Congo Government is an unknown quantity, but it would probably see reason if approached the proper way."

"The U.S. consul tells me," said Yerkes, "that the Congo Government is the rottenest aggregate of cutthroats, horse-thieves, thugs, yeggs, common-or-ordinary hold-ups and slight-of-hand professors that the world ever saw in one God-forsaken country. He says they're of every nationality, but without squeam of any kind—hang or shoot you as soon as look at you! He says if there's any ivory buried in those parts they've either got it and sold it, or else they buried it themselves and spread the story for a trap to fetch greenhorns over the border!"

"That man's after the stuff himself!" said Fred. "All he wanted to do was stall you off!"

"That man Schillingschen the doctor told us about," said Monty, "is suspected of knowing where to look for some of the Congo hoard. He'll bear watching. He's in British East at present—said to be combing Nairobi and other places for a certain native. He is known to stand high in the favor of the German Government, but he poses as a professor of ethnology."

"He shall study deathnology," said Fred, "if he gets in my way!"

"The Congo people," said Monty, "would have dug up the stuff, of course, if they'd known where to look for it. Our people believe that the Germans do know whereabouts to look for it but dread putting the Congo crowd on the scent. If we're after it, we've got to do two things besides agreeing between ourselves."

"Deal me in, Monty!" said Yerkes.

"*Nil desperandum*, Didums, *duce*, then!" said Fred. "I propose Monty for leader. Those against the motion take their shirts off and see if they can lick me! Nobody pugnacious? The ayes have it! Talk along, Didums!"

For all Fred's playfulness, Yerkes and I came in of our free and considered will, and Monty understood that.

"We've got to separate," he said, "and I've got to interview the King of the Belgians."

"If that were my job," grinned Yerkes. "I'd prob'ly tell him things!"

"I don't pretend to like him," said Monty. "But it seems to me I can serve our best interests by going to Brussels. He can't very well refuse me a private audience. He's rapacious—but I think not ninety per cent. rapacious."

"Good," said I. "But why separate?"

"If we traveled toward the Congo from this place in a bunch," said Monty, "we should give the game away completely and have all the rag-tag and bob-tail on our heels. As it is, our only chance of shaking all of them would be to go round by sea and enter the Congo from the other side; but that would destroy our chance of picking up the trail in German East. So I'll go to Brussels and get back to British East as fast as possible.

"Fred must go to British East and watch Schillingschen. You two fellows may as well go by way of British East to Muanza on Victoria Nyanza and from there on to the Congo border by way of Ujiji. Yerkes is an American, and they'll suspect him less than any of us—they'd nail me, of course, in a minute! So let Yerkes make a great show of looking for land to settle on."

"We two'll have all the Greeks of Zanzibar trailing us!" objected Yerkes.

"That'll be better than having them trail the lot of us," said Monty. "You'll be able to shake them somewhere on the way. We'll count on your ingenuity, Will."

"But what am I to do to Schillingschen?" asked Fred.

"Keep an eye on him."

"Do you see me *Sherlock-Holmesing* him across the high veld? Piffle! Give America that job! I'll go through German East and keep ahead of the Greeks!"

But Monty was firm.

"Yerkes has a plausible excuse, Fred. They may wonder why an American should look for land in German East, but they'll let him do it and perhaps not spy on him to any extent. It's me they've their eye on. I'll try to keep 'em dazzled. You go to British East and dazzle Schillingschen! Now, are we agreed?"

We were. But we talked, nevertheless, long into the afternoon, and in the end there was not one of us really satisfied. Over and over we tried to persuade Monty to omit the Brussels part of the plan. We wanted him with us. But he stuck to his point and had his way, as he always did when we were quite sure he really wanted it.

II

GLEAM, oh brighter than jewels gleam, my swinging stars in the opal dark,
Mirrored along wi' the fire-fly dance of longshore light and offshore mark,
The roof-lamps and the riding-lights and fiery wake of ship and shark.

I WAS old when the lights of Arab ships
(All seas were lawless then!)
Abode the tide where liners ride
Today, and Malays then;
Old when the bold da Gama came
With culverin and creed
To trade where Solomon's men fought
And plunder where the banyans bought.
I sighed when the first o' the slaves were brought
And laughed when the last were freed.

DEEP, oh deeper than anchors drop, the bones o' the outbound sailors lie,
Far, oh farther than breath o' wind, the rumors o' fabled fortune fly,
And the 'venturers yearn from the ends of earth, for none o' the isles is as fair as I!

The Njo Hapa Song, Verse 2

THE enormous map of Africa loses no lure or mystery from the fact of nearness to the continent itself. Rather it increases. In the hot upper room that night, through the smoke of oil-lamps, we pored over the large-scale map Monty had saved from the wreck along with our money, drafts and papers.

The atmosphere was one of bygone piracy. The great black ceiling beams, heavy-legged table of two-inch planks, floor laid like a *dhow's* deck—making utmost use of odd lengths of timber but strong enough to stand up under hurricanes and overloads of plunder or to batten down rebellious slaves—murmurings from rooms below, where men of every race that haunts those shark-infested seas were drinking and telling tales that would make Munchausen's reputation, steaminess, outer darkness, spicy equatorial smells and, above all, knowledge of the nature of the coming quest united to veil the map in fascination.

"There are two things that have stuck in my memory that Lord Salisbury used to say when I was an Eton boy, spending a holiday at Hatfield House," said Monty.

"One was: never talk fight unless you mean fight; then fight—don't talk. The other was: always study the largest maps."

"Who's talking fight?" demanded Fred. Monty ignored him.

"Even this map isn't big enough to give a real idea of distances, but it helps. You see, there's no railway beyond Victoria Nyanza. Anything at all might happen in those great spaces beyond Uganda. Borderlands are quarrel-grounds. I should say the junction of British, Belgian and German territory, where Arab loot lies buried, is the last place to dally in unarmed. You fellows 'ud better scour Zanzibar in the morning for the best guns to be had here."—

So I went to bed at midnight with that added stuff for building dreams. He who has bought guns remembers with a thrill; he who has not, has in store for him the most delightful hours of life. May he fall, as our lot was, on a gunsmith who has mended hammerlocks for Arabs and who loves rifles as some greater rascals love a woman or a horse.

We all four strolled next morning, clad in the khaki reach-me-downs that a Goanese "universal provider" told us were the "latest thing," into a den between a camel stable and an even mustier-smelling home of gloom, where oxen, tied nose-to-tail, went round and round, grinding out semsem everlastingly, while a lean Swahili sang to them. When he ceased, they stopped. When he sang, they all began again.

In a bottle-shaped room at the end of a passage, squeezed between those two centers of commerce, sat the owner of the gun-store, part-Arab, part-Italian, part-Englishman, apparently older than sin itself, toothless, except for one yellow fang that lay like an ornament over his lower lip, and able to smile more winningly than any siren of the sidewalk. Evidently he shaved at intervals, for white stubble stood out a third of an inch all over his wrinkled face.

The upper part of his head was utterly bald, slippery, shiny, smooth and adorned by an absurd, round Indian cap, too small, that would not stay in place and had to be hitched at intervals.

He said his name was Captain Thomas Cook, and the license to sell firearms framed on the mud-brick wall bore him witness. May he live forever under any name he chooses!

"Goons?" he said. "Goons? You gentlemen want goons? I have the goon what settled the hash of Sayed bin Mohammed—here it be. This other one's the rifle—see the nicks on her butt—that Kamarajes, the Greek, used. See 'em—Arab goons—slaver goons—smooth-bore elephant goons—fours, eights, twelves—Martinis—them's the lot that was reekin' red-hot, days on end, in the last Arab war on the Congo—considerable used up but goin' cheap. Then here's Mausers (he pronounced it "Morsers") old-style, same as used in 1870—good goons they be, long o' barrel and strong, but too high trajectory for some folks; some's new style, magazines an' all—fine till a grain o' sand jams 'em oop. An' here's Lee-Enfields, souvenirs o' the Boer War, some o' them bought from folks what plundered a battlefield or two—mostly all in good condition.

"Look at this one—see it—hold it—take a squint at it! Nineteen elephants shot wi' that Lee-Enfield, an' the man's in jail for shootin' of 'em! Sold at auction by the Gov'ment, that one was. See, here's an express, a beauty, owned by an officer fr'm Indy—took by a shark 'e was, in swimmin' against all advice, him what had hunted tigers! There's no goon store a quarter as good as mine 'tween Cairo an' the Cape or Bombay an' Boma! Captain Cook's the boy to sell ye goons, all right! Sit down. Look 'em over. Ask anything ye want to know. I'll tell ye. No obligation to buy."

We spent a morning with Captain Thomas Cook and left the store—Fred, Yerkes and I—with a battery of weapons, including a pistol apiece, that any expedition might be proud of.

Between then and the next afternoon, when the British India steamboat sailed, with patience beyond belief, Monty restrained us from paying court to Tippoo Tib.

"The U. S. Consul says he's better worth a visit than most of the world's museums," Yerkes assured us two or three times. "He says Tippoo Tib's a fine old sport. What's the harm in our having a chin with him?"

But Monty was adamant.

"A call on him would prove nothing, but he and his friends would suspect. Spies would inform the German Government. No. Let's act as if Tippoo Tib were out of mind."

Hassan came again, shiny with sweat and voluble with offers of information and assistance.

"Where you gentlemen going?" he kept asking.

"England," said Monty, and he showed his own steamer ticket in proof of it.

THAT settled Hassan for the time, but Georges Coutlass was not so easy. He came swaggering upstairs and thumped on Monty's door with the air of a bearer of king's messages.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked. "Where are you going? Hassan told me England. Are you all going to England? If so, why have you bought guns? What will you do with six rifles, three shotguns, and three pistols on the London streets? What will you do with tents in London? Will you make camp-fires in Regent Circus, that you take with you all those cooking-pots? And all that rice—is that for the English to eat? Bah!

"No tenderfoot can fool me! You go to find my ivory, d'you hear! You think to get away with it unknown to me! I tell you I have sharp ears! By ——, there is nothing I can not find out that goes on in Africa! You think to cheat me? Then you are as good as dead men! You shall die like dogs! I will smithereen the whole —— lot of you before you touch a tusk!"

"Get out of here!" growled Yerkes.

"Give him a chance to go quietly, Will," urged Monty, and Coutlass heard him.

Peaceful advice seemed the last spark needed to explode his crowded magazines of fury. He clenched his fists—spat because the words would not flow fast enough and screamed.

"Give me a chance, eh? A chance, eh?" Other doors began opening, and the appearance of an audience stimulated him to further peaks of rage. "The only chance I need is a sight of your carcasses within range, and a long range will do for Georges Coutlass!" He glared past Yerkes at Monty, who had risen leisurely. "You call yourself a lord? I call you a thief! A jackal!"

"Here, get out!" growled Yerkes.

"I will go when I —— please, you Yankee jackanapes!" the Greek retorted through set teeth.

Yerkes is a free man, able and willing to shoulder his own end of any argument. He closed, and the Greek's ribs cracked. But Coutlass was no weakling either, and, though he gasped, he gathered himself for a terrific effort.

"Come on," cried Monty and went past me through the door like a bolt from a catapult.

Fred followed me, and, when he saw us both out on the landing, Monty started down the stairs.

"Come on!" he called again.

We followed, for there is no use in choosing a leader if you don't intend to obey him, even on occasions when you fail at once to understand. There was one turn on the wide stairs, and Monty stood there, back to the wall.

"Go below, you fellows, and catch!" he laughed. "We don't want Will jailed for homicide!"

The struggle was fierce and swift. Coutlass searched with a thumb for Will's eye and stamped on his instep with an iron-shod heel. But he was a dissolute brute, and for all his strength Yerkes' cleaner living very soon told. Presently Will spared a hand to wrench at the ambitious thumb, and Coutlass screamed with agony. Then he began to sway this way and that without volition of his own, yielding his balance and losing it again and again. In another minute Yerkes had him off his feet, cursing and kicking.

"Steady, Will!" called Monty from below. But it was altogether too late for advice.

Will gathered himself like a spring and hurled the Greek down-stairs backward.

Then the point of Monty's strategy appeared. He caught him, saved him from being stunned against the wall and, before the Greek could recover sufficiently to use heels and teeth or whisk out the knife he kept groping for, hurled him a stage further on his journey—face forward this time—down to where Fred and I were waiting.

We kicked him out into the street, too dazed to do anything but wander home.

"Are you hurt, Will?" laughed Monty. "This isn't the States, you know; by ——, they'll jail you here if you do your own police work!"

"Aw—quit preaching!" Yerkes answered. "If I hadn't seen you there on the stairs with your mouth open I'd have been satisfied to put him down and spank him!"

It was then that the much more unexpected struck us speechless—even Monty for the moment, who is not much given to social indecision. One does not look in Zanzibar for ladies with a Mayfair accent. Yet an indubitable Englishwoman came to the head of the stairs and stood beside Yerkes, looking down at the rest of us with a sort of well-bred, tolerant scorn.

"Am I right in believing this is Lord Montdidier?" she asked, pronouncing the word as it should be—Mundidger.

She had been very beautiful. She still was handsome in a hard-lipped, bold way, with abundant raven hair and a complexion that would have been no worse for a touch of rouge. She seemed to scorn all the conventional refinements, though. Her lacy, white dress, open at the neck, was creased and not too clean, but she wore in her bosom one great jewel like a ruby, set in brilliants, that gave the lie to poverty —provided the gems were real. She wore no wedding-ring that I could see. And she took no more notice of Will Yerkes beside her than if he had been part of the furniture.

"Why do you ask?" asked Monty, starting up-stairs.

She had to make way for him, for Will Yerkes stood his ground.

"A fair question!" she laughed. Her voice had a hard ring. "I am Lady Saffren Waldon—Isobel Saffren Waldon."

Fred and I had followed Monty up and were close behind him. I heard him mutter "Oh, Lord!" under his breath.

"I knew your brother," she added.

"I know you did."

"You think that gives me no claim on your acquaintance? Perhaps it doesn't. But as an unprotected woman——"

"There is the residency," objected Monty, "and the law."

She laughed bitterly.

"Thank you, I am in need of no passage home! I overheard that ruffian say, and I think I heard you say, too, that you are going to England. I want you to take a message for me."

"There is a post-office here," said Monty without turning a hair. He looked straight into her iron eyes. "There is a cable-station. I will lend you money to cable with."

"Thank you, my lord!" she sneered. "I have money. I am so used to being snubbed that my skin would not feel a whip! I want you to take a verbal message!"

IT WAS perfectly evident that Monty would rather have met the devil in person than this untidy dame; yet he was only afraid apparently of conceding her too much claim on his attention. If she had asked favors of me, I don't doubt I would have scrambled to be useful. I began mentally taking her part, wondering why Monty should treat her so cavalierly. I fancy Yerkes did the same.

"Tell me the message, and I'll tell you whether I'll take it," said Monty.

She laughed again, even more bitterly.

"If I could tell it on these stairs," she answered, "I could cable it. They censor cablegrams and open letters in this place."

"I suspect that isn't true," said Monty. "But if you object to witnesses, how do you propose to deliver your message to me?" he asked pointedly.

"You mean you refuse to speak with me alone?"

"My friends would draw out of ear-shot," he answered.

"Your friends? Your gang, you mean!"

She drew herself up very finely—very stately. Very lovely she was to look at in that half-light, with the shadows of Tippoo Tib's* old stairway hiding her tale of years. But I felt my regard for her slipping down-hill.

"You look well, Lord Mundidger, trapesing about the earth with a leash of mongrels at your heel! *Falstaff* never picked up a more sordid-looking pack. What do you feed them—bones? Are there no young bloods left of your own class, that you need travel with tradesmen?"

Monty stood with both hands behind him and never turned a hair. Fred Oakes brushed up the ends of that troubador mustache of his and struck more or less of an attitude. Will reddened to the ears, and I never felt more uncomfortable in all my life.

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* The principal hotel in Zanzibar was formerly Tippoo Tib's residence—quite a magnificent mansion for that period and place.

"So this is your gang, is it?" she went on. "It looks sober at present! I suppose even tavern brawlers respect you sufficiently to keep a lady's secret if you order them. I will hope they have manhood enough to hold their tongues!"

Of course, dressed in the best that Zanzibar stores had to offer, we scarcely looked like fashion-plates. My shirt was torn where Coutlass had seized it to resist being thrown out, but I failed to see what she hoped to gain by that tongue-lashing, even supposing we had been the lackeys she pretended to believe we were.

"The message is to my brother," she went on.

"I don't know him!" put in Monty promptly.

"You mean you don't like him! Nevertheless, I give you this message to take to him! Please tell him that I, his sister, Lady Saffren Waldon, know now the secret of Tippoo Tib's ivory. He is to join me here at once. Will you tell him that?"

"No!" answered Monty. "I will carry no message for you."

"How dare you say that in front of your gang!"

I should have been inclined to continue the argument myself—to try to find out what she did know and to uncover her game. But Monty saw fit to stride past her through his open bedroom door and shut it behind him firmly. We stood looking at her and at one another stupidly until she turned her back and went to her own room on the floor above. Then we followed Monty.

"Did she say anything else?" he asked as soon as we were inside.

I noticed he was sweating freely now.

"Didums, you're too polite!" Fred answered. "You ought to have told her to keep her tongue housed or be civil!"

"I don't hold with hitting back at a lone woman," said Yerkes; "but what was she driving at? What did she mean by calling us a pack of mongrels?"

"Merely her way," said Monty offhandedly. "She married a baronet, and he divorced her. Bad scandal. Saffren Waldon was at the War Office. She stole papers, or something of that sort—delivered them to a German paramour—von Duvitz was his name, I think. She and her brother were lucky to keep out of jail. Ever since then she has been some say one thing, some another. My brother fell foul of her and lived to regret it. She's on her last legs, I don't doubt, or she wouldn't be in Zanzibar."

"Then why the obvious nervous sweat you're in?" demanded Fred.

"And that don't account for the abuse she handed out to us," said Yerkes.

"Why not tip off the authorities that she's a notorious spy?" I asked.

"I expect they know all about her," he answered.

"But why your alarm?" insisted Fred.

"I'm scarcely alarmed, old thing. But it's pretty obvious, isn't it, that she wants us to believe she knows what we're after. She's vindictive. She imagines she owes me a grudge on my brother's account. It might soothe her to think she had made me nervous. And by gad—it sounds like lunacy, and mind you I'm not propounding it for fact—there's just one chance that she really does know where the ivory is!"

"But where's the sense of abusing us?" repeated Yerkes.

"That's the poor thing's way of claiming class superiority," said Monty. "She was born into one class, married into another and divorced into a third. She's likely to forget she said an unkind word next time she meets you. Give her one chance and she'll pretend she believes you were born to the purple—flatter you until you half-believe it yourself. Later on, when it suits her at the moment, she'll denounce you as a special imposter! It's just habit—bad habit, I admit—comes of the life she leads. Lots of 'em like her. Few of 'em quite so well-informed, though, and dangerous if you give 'em a chance."

"I still don't see why you're sweating," said Fred.

"It's hot. There's a chance she knows where the ivory is! She has money; but how? She'd have begged if she were short of cash! It's my impression she has been in German Government employ for a number of years. Possibly they have paid her to do some spy-work—in the Zanzibar court, perhaps—the sultan's a mere boy——"

"Isn't he woolly-headed?" objected Yerkes.

"Mainly Arab. It's a French game to

send a white woman to intrigue at colored courts, but the Germans are good imitators."

"Isn't she English?" asked Yerkes.

"Her trade's international," said Monty dryly. "My guess is that Coutlass or Hassan told her what we're supposed to be doing here, and she pretends to know where the ivory is in order to trap us all in some way. The net's spread for me, but there's no objection to catching you fellows as well."

"She'll need to use sweeter bait than I've seen yet!" laughed Yerkes.

"Whatever her game is," said Monty, "don't let us play it for her. If she gets hold of you fellows, one at a time or altogether, for the love of heaven tell her nothing. Let her tell all she likes—but admit nothing, tell nothing, ask no questions! That's an old rule in diplomacy.

"Old-stagers can divine the young one's secrets from the nature of the questions they ask. Don't lie either. It would take a very old hand to lie to her in such a way that she couldn't see through it."

"Why not be simply rude and turn our backs?" said I.

"Best of all—provided you can do it. Remember, she's an old hand."

"D'you mean," said Yerkes, "that, if she were to offer proof that she knows where that ivory is and proposed terms, you wouldn't talk it over?"

"I mean let her alone!" said Monty.

FOLK dine late in the tropics, and we dallied over coffee and cigars so that it was going on for ten o'clock when Yerkes and I started upstairs again. Monty and Fred went out to see the water-front by moonlight.

We had reached our door—he and I shared one great room—when we heard terrific screams from the floor above—a woman's—one after another, piercing, fearful, hair-raising and so suggestive in that gloomy, grim building that a man's very blood stood still.

Yerkes went like an arrow from a bow, and I after him. The screams had stopped before we reached the stairhead, but there was no doubting which her room was; the door was partly open, permitting a view of armchairs and feminine garments in some disorder. We heard a man talking loud, quick Arabic, and a woman—pleading, I thought. Yerkes rapped on the door.

"Come in!" said a voice, and I followed Yerkes in.

We were met by her Syrian maid, a creature with gazelle eyes and timid manner, who came through the doorway leading to an inner room.

"What's the trouble?"

The woman signed to us to go on in.

Yerkes led the way again impulsively as any knight errant rescuing beleaguered dames, but I looked back and saw that the Syrian woman had locked the outer door. Before I could tell Yerkes that, he was in the next room; so I followed and, like him, stood rather bewildered

Lady Saffren Waldon sat facing us, in no apparent trouble, not alone. There were four very well-dressed Arabs standing to one side. She sat in a basket-chair by a door that pretty obviously led into her bedroom and kept one foot on a pillow, although I suspected there was not much the matter with it.

"We heard screams. Thought you were being murdered!" said Yerkes, out of breath.

"Oh, indeed no! I twisted my ankle—not seriously. Since you are here, sit down, won't you."

"No, thanks," said Yerkes, turning to go.

"The maid locked the door on us!" said I, and, before the words were out of my mouth, three of the Arabs slipped into the outer room.

They were big men, and the folds of their garments were sufficiently voluminous to have hidden a dozen guns apiece.

"She'll open it!" said Yerkes with inflection that a fool could understand.

"One minute, please!" said Lady Saffren Waldon. It was no poor imitation of Queen Elizabeth ordering courtiers about.

"We didn't come to talk," said Yerkes. "Heard screams. Made a mistake. Sorry. We're off!"

"No mistake," she said, and the sweetness Monty prophesied began to show itself. The change in her voice was too swift to be convincing. "I did scream. I was in pain. It was kind of you to come. Since you are here, I would like you to talk to this gentleman."

She glanced at the Arab, an able-looking man with nose and eyes expressive of keen thought and the groomed gray beard that makes an Arab always dignified.

"Some other time," said Will.

And he turned to go again.

"No—now," she said. "You can't get out! You may as well be sensible and listen!"

We glanced at each other, and both remembered Monty's warning. Yerkes laughed.

"Take seats," she said with a very regal gesture.

She was not carelessly dressed as she had been earlier in the day. From hair to silken hose and white kid shoes she was immaculate, and she wore rouge and powder now. In that yellow lamplight—carefully placed no doubt—she was certainly good-looking. In fact, she was good-looking at any time and only no longer able to face daylight with the tale of youth. Her eyes were weapons, nothing less. We remained standing.

"This gentleman will speak to you," she said, motioning to the Arab to commence, and he bowed—from the shoulders upward.

"I am from his Highness, the Sultan of Zanzibar," he announced a little pompously. "A minister from his Highness." In announcing their own importance, Arabs very seldom err in the direction of underestimate. "I speak about the ivory, which, I am informed, you propose to set out on a journey to discover."

"Where did you get your information?" Yerkes countered.

"Don't be absurd!" ordered Lady Saffren Waldon. "I gave it him. Where else need he go to get it?"

"Where did you get it, then?" he retorted.

"Never mind! Listen to what Hamed Ibrahim has to say."

The Arab bowed his head slightly a second time.

"The ivory you seek," he said, "is said to be Tippoo Tib's own. Such little part of it as ever was his was long ago swallowed by the interest on claims against him. The whole is now in truth the property of his Highness, the Sultan of Zanzibar, and whoever discovers it shall receive reward from the owner. His Highness is willing, through me, his minister, to make treaty in advance in writing with suitable parties intending to make search."

"You mean the sultan wants to hire me to hunt for ivory for him?" Yerkes asked, and the Arab made a gesture of impatience.

At that Lady Saffren Waldon cut in, very vinegary once more:

"You two men are prisoners. Show much more sense. Come to terms or take the consequences. Listen! Tippoo Tib buried the ivory. The Sultan of Zanzibar claims it. The German Government, for reasons of its own, backs the sultan's claim; ivory found in German East will be handed over to him in support of his claim to all the rest of it. If you—Lord Montdidier and the rest of you—care to sign an agreement with the Sultan of Zanzibar, you can have facilities. You shall be supplied with guides who can lead you to the right place to start your search from——"

"Thought you wanted Lord Montdidier to say in London that you know where it all is," Yerkes objected.

She colored slightly and glared.

"Perhaps I am one of the guides," she said darkly. "I know more than I need tell for the sake of this argument! The point is: you can have facilities if you sign an agreement with the sultan. Otherwise, every difficulty will be made for you—every treachery conceivable practised on you! The British Government once offered ten per cent. of the value of the ivory found. The Sultan of Zanzibar offers twenty per cent.——"

"Twenty-five per cent.," corrected Hamed Ibrahim.

"Yes, but I should want five per cent. for my commission!"

"This sounds like a different yarn from the one you told on the stairs this afternoon," said Yerkes. "See Monty and tell it to him."

"It is for you to tell Lord Montdidier. He runs away from me!"

"I refuse to tell him a word!" said Yerkes, with a laugh like that of a boy about to plunge into a swimming-pool—a sort of "Here goes!" laugh.

"You are extremely ill-advised!"

"Do your worst! Monty'll be hunting for us two in about a minute. We're prisoners, are we? Suit yourself!"

"You are prisoners while I choose! You could be killed in this room, removed in sacks, thrown to the sharks in the roadstead—and nobody the wiser. But, as it happens, that would not suit my purpose!"

WE BOTH glanced behind us involuntarily. In the act of turning, the three Arabs, who had previously left the room, threw nooses over our heads and bound our arms to our sides with the jiffy-swiftness only sailors know. The third man put the finishing touches and presently adjusted gags with a neatness and solicitude worthy of the Inquisition.

In another second our heels were struck from under us and I was half-stunned by the impact of my head against the solid floor—for all the floors of that great place were built to resist eternity.

"Now!" she said. "Show them knives!"

We were shown forthwith the ugliest, most suggestive weapons I have ever seen—long, sliver-thin blades, sharper than razors. The Arabs knelt on our chests—their knees were harder and more merciless than wooden clubs—and laid the blades edge-upward on the skin of our throats.

"Let them feel!" she ordered.

I felt a sharp cut, and the warm blood trickled down over my jugular to the floor. I knew it was only a skin-cut, but I did not pretend I was enjoying the ordeal.

"Now!" she said.

The Arabs stepped away and she came and stood between us, looking down at one and then the other.

"There isn't a place in Africa," she said, "that you can hide in where the sultan's men can't find you! There isn't a British officer in Africa who would believe you if you told what has happened in this room tonight! Yet Lord Montdidier will believe you—he knows me! So tell Lord Montdidier exactly what has happened!

"Assure him with my compliments that his throat and yours shall be cut as surely as you dare set out after that ivory without signing my agreement first! Tell Lord Montdidier he may be friends with me if he cares to. As his friend, I will help make him rich for life! As his enemy, I will make Africa too hot and dangerous to hold him! Let him choose!"

She stepped back and, without troubling to turn away, put powder on her nose and chin.

"Now let them up!" she said.

The Arabs lifted us to our feet.

"Loose them!"

The expert of the three slipped the knots like a wizard doing parlor tricks; but I noticed that the other two held their knives extremely cautiously. We should have been dead men if we had made a pugnacious motion.

"Now you may go. Unless Lord Montdidier agrees with me, the only safety for any of you is away from Africa. Go and tell him. Go!"

"I'll give you your answer now," said Yerkes.

"No, you don't!" said I, remembering Monty's urgent admonition to tell her nothing and ask no questions. "Come away, Will. There's nothing to be gained by talking back."

"Right you are," he said, laughing like a boy whose fight had been broken off without his seeking or consent.

Like me, he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped blood from his neck. The sight of his own blood—even such a little trickle—has a peculiar effect on a man.

"By Jimminy, she has scratched the wrong dog's ear!" he growled to me as we went to the door together.

"They're all in there!" I said excitedly, when the door slammed shut behind me. "Hurry down and get me a gun! I'll hold the door while you run for police and have 'em all arrested!"

"Piffle!" he answered. "Come on. Three sultan's witnesses and two lone white women against us two—come away. Come away."

Monty and Fred were still out; so we went to our own room.

"I'm wondering," I said, "what Monty will say."

"I'm not!" said Yerkes. "I'm not going to tell Monty a blessed word. See here—there's a scheme on to get the stuff, when who should come on the scene but our little party, and that makes 'em all nervous. Monty's a bad man to be up against. He knows she's a desperado, and she thinks he'll draw the line at a trip that promises murder and blackmail and such-like dirty work. So she puts a scare into us with a view to our throwing a scare into him. If I scare any one, it's going to be that dame herself. I'll not tell Monty a thing."

"How about Coutlass the Greek?" said I. "D'you suppose he's her accomplice?"

"Maybe. One of her dupes, perhaps. I suspect she'll suck him dry of information and cast him off like a lemon rind. I dare bet she's using him. She can't use me. Will you tell Monty?"

"No," I said.

"Here come Monty and Fred. Is my neck still bloody? No—yours doesn't show."

We met them at the stairhead, for the sake of appearing casual, and Monty did not seem to notice anything.

"Fred has composed a song to the moonlight on Zanzibar roadstead while you fellows were merely after-dinner mundane. D'you suppose the landlord 'ud make trouble if we let him sing it?"

"Let's hope so!" said Yerkes. "I'm itching for a row like they say drovers in Monty's country itch for mile-stones! Let Fred warble. I'll fight whoever comes!"

Monty eyed him and me swiftly but made no comment.

"Bill's homesick!" said Fred. "The U. S. eagle wants its Bowery! We'll sooth the fowl with thoughts of other things—where's the concertina?"

"No, no, Fred. That'll be too much din!"

Monty made a grab for the instrument, but Fred raised it above his head and brought it down between his knees with chords that crashed like wedding-bells. Then he changed to softer, languorous music and, when he had picked out an air to suit his mood, sat down and turned Art loose to do her worst.

He has a good voice. If he would only not pull such faces or make so sure that folk within a dozen blocks can hear him, he might pass for a professional.

"Music suggestive of moonlight," he said and began:

"The sentry palms stand motionless. Masts move against the sky.
With measured creak of curving spars *dhows* gently to the jeweled stars
Rock out a lullaby.
Silver and black sleeps Zanzibar. The moonlit ripples croon
Soft songs of loves that perfect are, long tales of red-lipped spoils of war,
And you—you smile, you moon!

For I think that beam on the placid sea
That splashes and spreads and dips and gleams,
That dances and glides till it comes to me
Out of infinite sky, is the path of dreams,
And down that lane the memories run
Of all that's wild beneath the sun!"

"You fellows like that one? Anybody coming? Nobody for Yerkes to fight yet? Too bad! Well—we'll try again! There's no chorus. It's all poetic stuff, too gentle to be yowled by three such cannibals as you! Listen!"

Old as the moonlit silences, tonight's loves are the same
As when for ivory from far and cloves and gems of Zanzibar
King Solomon's men came.
Sinful and still the same roofs lie that knew da Gama's heel,
Those beams that light these sleepy waves looked on when men threw murdered slaves
To make the sharks a meal.

And I think that beam on the silvered swell
That spreads and splashes and gleams and dips,
That has shone on the cruel and brave as well,
On the trail o' the slaves and the ivory ships,
Is the lane down which the memories run
Of all that is wild beneath the sun.

The concertina wailed into a sort of minor dirge and ceased. Fred fastened the catch and put the instrument away.

"Why don't you applaud?" he asked.

"Oh, bravo, bravo!" said Yerkes and I together.

Monty looked hard at both of us.

"Strange!" he remarked. "You're both distracted, and you've each got a slight cut over the jugular!"

"Been trying out razors," said Yerkes.

"Um-m!" remarked Monty. "Well—I'm glad it's no worse. How about bed, eh? Better lock your door—that lady upstairs is what the Germans call *gefährlich* (dangerous)! Goo'night!"

III

TONGUES! Oh, music of Eastern tongues, harmonied murmur of streets ahum!
Trade! Oh, frasil weights of clove—ivory—copra—copal gum—
Rubber—vanilla and tortoise-shell! The methods change. The captains come.

I WAS old when the clamor o' Babel's end
(All seas were chartless then!)
Drove forth the brood, and solitude
Was the newest quest of men.
I lay like a gem in a silken sea,
Unseen, uncoveted, unguessed,
'Till scented winds that waft afar
Bore word o' the warm delights there are
Where ground-swells sing by Zanzibar
Long rhapsodies of rest.

WILD, oh wilder than Winter blasts, my wet skies shriek when the winds are freed.
Mild, oh milder than virgin mirth, is the laugh o' my reefs where the sea-birds feed.
Screaming and skirling and down again. If the sea-birds warn, should the captains heed?

The Njo Hapa Song, Verse 3

WE HAD a privy councillor of England of our party, and favors were shown us that never fall to the lot of ordinary travelers. Opposite the sultan's palace is the sultan's private wharf, so royal and private that it is a prison offense to trespass on it without written permission. Because of his official call at the residency and of his card left on the sultan, wires had been pulled, and a pompous individual, whose black face sweated greasily and whose palm itched for unearned increment, called on Monty very shortly after breakfast with intimation that the wharf had been placed at our disposal, since his Highness, the Sultan of Zanzibar, desired to do us honor.

So, when the B. I. steamer dropped anchor in the great roadstead shortly after noon, we were taken to the wharf by one of the sultan's household, a very civil-spoken Arab gentleman, and three English officers met us there. They made a fuss over Monty and were at pains to be agreeable to the rest of us. While we stood chatting and waiting for the boat that should row us and belongings the mile and a half or so to the steamer, I saw something that made me start. Fred gazed presently in the same direction.

"Johnson is number one!" he said as if checking off my mental processes. He meant Hassan. "Number two is Georges Coutlass, our friend the Greek. Number three is — am I drunk this early in the day? What do you see? Doesn't she look to you like— By the big blind god of men's mistakes, it's— Monty! Didums, you deaf idiot, look! See!"

At that everybody naturally looked the same way. Everybody nodded. Coutlass the Greek and Hassan were headed in one boat toward the steamer.

On the beach, still surrounded by a swarm of longshoremen who yelled and fought to carry them through the surf, Lady Isobel Saffren Waldon and her Syrian maid stood at bay. Her two Swahili men servants were overwhelmed and already being carried to a boat. Her luggage was being borne helter-skelter after them, and another boat waited for her just beyond the belt of surf, the rowers standing up to yell encouragement at the sweating pack that dared not close in on its victims.

"It's a pity," said the senior officer present.

"Yet we daren't accord her official recognition. She'd be certain to make capital out of it. We're awfully glad she's going. The residency atmosphere is one huge sigh of relief. We would like to speed the parting guest, but it mayn't be done. However, you'll see there are others not so particular. I imagine her friends are late for the appointment."

"Where's she going?" asked Monty.

"British East. She has drafts on a German merchant in Nairobi."

We were rowed to the ship and were watching our piles of luggage arrive up the accommodation ladder when Lady Isobel Saffren Waldon arrived alongside in the official boat of the German consulate, a German officer in white uniform on either hand and the German ensign at the stern.

"Pretty fair impudence, paying official honors to our undesirables. Yet I don't see what we can do," said the senior from the residency.

Yerkes drew me aside.

"Did you ever see anything more stupidly British?" he demanded. "It's as obvious as the nose on your face that she's up to some game. It's as plain as twice two that the Germans are backing her, whether the British like it or not. Look at those two Heinies now!"

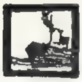
We faced about and watched them. After bowing Lady Waldon to her cabin, they approached our party with brazen claim to recognition—and received it. They were met cordially as if their friendship had been indisputable.

"Did you ever see anything to beat it? Why not kick 'em into the sea? Either that woman's a crook or she isn't. If she isn't, then the British have treated her shamefully by turning their backs on her. But we know she is a crook. The Germans know it, too, and they're flaunting her under official British noses! They're using her to start something the British won't like, and the British know it!

"Yet she's going to be allowed to travel to British territory on a British ship, and the Heinies are shaken hands with. If you complained to Monty I bet he'd say, 'Don't talk fight unless you mean fight!' "

"Monty might also add, 'Don't talk—fight!' " said I.

"Oh, rot!" he answered. "British individuals may bridle a bit, but their Government'll shut its eyes until too late, whatever happens. You mark my words!"



COUTLASS and Hassan traveled second-class—the Arab and half-Arab contingent third. Yerkes swore at sight of Coutlass.

"To hear him brag you'd believe the British Government afraid of him!" he grumbled.

But an immediate problem drove Coutlass out of mind. Lady Isobel Saffren Waldon had been given a cabin in line with ours, at the end of our corridor. Cabins on those hot routes intercommunicated by a metal grille for ventilating purposes, and a word spoken in one cabin above a whisper could be heard in the next.

Fred was the first to realize conditions. He opened his door in his usual abrupt way to visit Monty's cabin and almost fell over the Syrian maid, her eye at Monty's keyhole—a little too early in the game to pass for sound judgment, as Fred assured her.

The alarm being given, we locked our cabin doors, repaired to the smoking-room and ordered drinks at a center table where no eavesdropper could overhear.

"It's one of two things," said Monty. "Either they know exactly where that ivory is or they haven't the slightest idea."

"My, but you're wise!" said Yerkes.

Monty ignored him.

"If they do know, they've some reason for not getting it themselves at present. If they don't know, they suspect we know and intend to claim what we find."

"How should they think we know?" objected Yerkes. "The first we heard of the stuff was in the lazaretto in Zanzibar."

"True. Juma told us. Juma probably told them that we told him. Natives often put the cart before the horse without the slightest intention of lying."

"But why should they believe him?"

"Why not? Zanzibar's agog with the story—after all these years. The ivory must have been buried more than a quarter of a century ago. Some one's been stirring the mud. We arrive unexpectedly from nowhere, ask questions about the ivory, make plans for British East—and there you are! The people who were merely determined to get the stuff jump to the false conclusion that we really know where it is."

"Q. E. D.!" said Fred, finishing his drink.

"Not at all," said Monty. "There are two things yet to be demonstrated. They're true, but not proven. The German Government is after the stuff, and has very special reasons for secrecy and tricks."

"We four against the German Government looks like longish odds," said I.

"Remains to be seen," said Monty. "If the German Government's very special reasons were legal or righteous they'd be announced with a fanfare of trumpets."

"Where's all this leading us?" demanded Fred.

"To a slight change of plan," said Monty.

"Thank the Lord. That means you don't go to Brussels—stay with us!"

"Nothing of the sort, Fred. But you three keep together. They're going to watch you. You watch them. Watch Schillingschen particularly closely if you find him. The closer they watch you, the more likely they are to lose sight of me. I'll take care to have several red herrings drawn across my trail after I reach London. Perhaps I'll return down the West Coast and travel up the Congo River."

The voyage is short between Zanzibar and Mombasa, but there was incident. We were spied on after a very thorough fashion, Lady Saffren Waldon's title and gracious bearing—when that suited her—being practical weapons. The purser was Goanese—beside himself with the fumes of flattery. He had a pass-key; so the Syrian maid went through our cabins and searched thoroughly everything except the wallet of important papers that Monty kept under his shirt.

The first and second officers were rather young, unmarried men possessed of limitless ignorance of the wiles of such as Lady Waldon. They were the ones who signed a paper recommending Coutlass to the B. I. agents and a lot of other reputable people in Mombasa and elsewhere, thus offsetting the possibility that the authorities might not let him land.

And at Mombasa we made our first united, serious mistake. It was put to the vote. We all agreed.

"I can come ashore," said Monty, "introduce you to officialdom, get you put up for the club and be useful generally. That, though, will lend color to the theory that you're in league with me. Whereas, if I leave you to your own resources, that may help lose my scent. When they pick it up again, we'll know better where we stand."

"What's your own proposal?" Fred demanded.

"I've stated it. I've a draft to bearer

for the amount you three have in the common fund—here, take it. If you think you'll need more than that, I'll have to go to the bank with you and cash some of my own draft. I think you'll have enough."

"Let's send him home!" proposed Fred.

"How about communications?"

We had already contrived a code with the aid of a pocket Portuguese-English dictionary, of which Fred and Monty each possessed copies of the same edition.

"The Mombasa Bank will forward telegrams and letters. You keep them posted as to your whereabouts. When I write the bank manager I'll ask him to keep my address a secret."

So we said good-by to Monty and left him on board—and wished we hadn't a dozen times before noon next day and a hundred times within the week.

THE last sight we had of him was as the shore boat came alongside the wharf and the half-breed customs officials pounced smiling on us. My eyes were keenest. I could see Monty pacing the upper deck, too rapidly for evidence of peace of mind—a straight-standing, handsome figure of a man. I pointed him out to the others, and we joked about him. Then the gloom of the customs shed swallowed us, and there was a new earth and, for the present, no more sea.

The island of Mombasa is like Zanzibar, a place of strange delights and bridled lawlessness controlled by the veriest handful of Englishmen. The great grim fort, that brave da Gama held against all comers, dominates the sea-front and the lower town.

Everything is different—everything strange—everything, except the heat, delightful. And, as Fred said—

"Some folk would grumble in hell!"

Last to be cynic or pessimist was Louis McGregor Abraham, proprietor of the Imperial Hotel—Syrian by birth, Jew by creed, Englishman by nationality, and admirer of all things prosperous and promising—except his rival, the Hotel Royal.

"You came to the right place," he assured us. "They'd have rooked you at the other hole—underfed you, overcharged you and filled you full of lies. I tell the truth."

And he did, some of it. He was inexhaustible, unconquerable, tireless, an optimist always. He had a store that was part of the hotel, in which he claimed to sell "everything the mind of man could wish for in East Africa"; and the boast was true. He even sold American dime-novels.

"East Africa's a great country!" he kept assuring us. "Richest country in the world—grow anything, find anything: game, climate, elevation, scenery, natives by the million to do the work—all good. Only waiting for white men with energy and capital to start things really moving."

But there were other points of view. We went to the bank and found its manager conservative. The amount of the draft we placed to our credit insured politeness.

"Be cautious," he advised us. "Take a good look round before you commit yourselves!"

He agreed to manage the interchange of messages between Monty and us and invited us all to dinner that evening at the club; so we left the bank feeling friendly.

But there was a shock in store, and as time passed the shocks increased in number and intensity. Our guns had not been surrendered to us by the customs people. We had paid duty on them second-hand at the rate for new ones and had then been told to apply for them at the collector's office, where our names and the guns' numbers would be registered.

We now went to claim them and on the way down inquired at a store about ammunition. We were told that, before we could buy cartridges, we would need a permit from the collector, specifying how many and of what bore we might buy. There was an Arab in the store ahead of us. He was buying Martini-Henry cartridges. I asked whether he had a permit and was told he did not need one.

"Being an Arab?" I asked.

"Being well-known to the Government," was the answer.

We left the store, feeling neither quite so confident nor friendly. And the collector's Goanese assistant did the rest of the disillusioning.

No, we could not have our guns. It was provided in regulations that we could have neither guns, sporting licenses, nor permits for ammunition. The guns were perfectly safe and would be returned to us when we chose to leave the country.

"But, good ——, we've paid duty on them!" Oakes protested.

"You should not have brought guns with

you unless you desired to pay duty," said the Goanese.

"But where's the collector?" Yerkes demanded.

"I am only assistant," was the answer. "How should I know?"

The man's insolence of demeanor and words was unveiled, and the more we argued with him the more sullen and evasive he grew, until at last he ordered us out of the office. At that we took chairs and announced our intention of staying until the collector should come or be fetched. We were informed that the collector was the most important Government official in Mombasa—which so delighted Fred that he grew almost good-tempered again.

"I'd rather twist a big tail than a little one!" he announced. "Shall we sing to pass the time?"

The Goanese called for the *askar*, half-soldier, half-policeman, who drowsed in meek solitude outside the office door.

"Remove these people, please!" he said in English, and then repeated it in Kiswahili.

The *askar* eyed us, shifted his bare feet uncomfortably, screwed up his courage and said something in his own tongue.

"Put them out, I said!" said the Goanese.

"He orders you to put us out!" grinned Fred.

"The office closes at three," said the Goanese, glancing at the clock in a half-hearted effort to moderate his own daring.

Yerkes pulled out two rupees and offered them to the sentry.

"Go and bring us some food," he said.

The sentry refused the money.

"Gee!" exclaimed Yerkes. "You've got to hand it to the British if they train colored police to refuse money!"

The *askar*, it seemed, was a man of more than one kind of discretion. Without another word to the Goanese he saluted the lot of us with a sweep of his arm, turned on his heel and vanished—not stopping in his hurry to put on the sandals that lay on the doorstep. We amused ourselves while he was gone by firing questions at the Goanese, calculated to disturb what might be left of his equanimity.

"How old are you? How much pay do you get? How long have you held your job? Do you ever get drunk? Are you married? Does your wife love you? Do you keep white mice? Is your life insured? How often have you been in jail?"

* * *

THE man was about distracted, for he had been unwise enough to try to answer, when suddenly the collector came in great haste and stalked through the office into the inner room.

The Goanese hurried after him.

There was five minutes' consultation behind the partition in tones too low for us to catch more than a word or two, and then Fernandez came out again.

"He says you are to go in there," he announced.

So we filed in, Fred Oakes first, and it seemed to me the moment I saw the collector's face that the outlook was not so depressing. He looked neither young nor incompetent. His neck sat on his shoulders with the air of full responsibility, unsought but not refused. And his eyes looked straight into those of each of us in turn with a frank challenge no honest fellow could resent.

"Take seats, won't you," he said. "Your names, please?"

We told him, and he wrote them down.

"My clerk tells me you tried to bribe the *askar*. You shouldn't do that. We are at great pains to keep the police dependable. It's too bad to put temptation in their way."

Yerkes with cold precision told him the exact facts. He listened to the end and then laughed.

"One more Goanese mistake!" he said. "The country has no money to spend on European office assistants. Well—what can I do for you?"

At that Fred cut loose.

"We want our guns before dark!" he said.

"Oh?" said the collector, eyeing us strangely. "I have information that you men are ivory-hunters. That you left Portuguese territory because the German consul there had to request the Portuguese Government to expel you."

"All easily disproved," said Fred.

"And that Lord Montdidier, with whom you have been traveling, became so disgusted with your conduct that he refused to land with you at this port.

It is no exaggeration to say that we all three gasped. The first thing that occurred to me, and I suppose to all of us, was to send for Monty. His steamer was not supposed to sail for an hour yet. But the thought had hardly flashed in mind when we heard the roar of steam and clanking as the anchor-chain came home. The sound traveled over water and across roofs like the knell of good luck.

"Where's her next stop?" said I.

"Suez," Fred answered.

Simultaneously then to all three the thought came, too, that this interpretation of Monty's remaining on board was exactly what we wanted. The more people suspected us of acting independently of him the better.

"Confront us with our accusers!" Fred insisted.

"You are not accused—at least not legally," said the collector. "You are refused rifle and ammunition permits—that is all."

"On the ground of being ivory-hunters?"

"Suspected persons—not known to the Government—something rather stronger than rumor to your discredit, and nothing known in your favor."

"What recourse have we?" Fred demanded.

"Well, what proof can you offer that you are *bona-fide* travelers or intending settlers? Are you ivory-hunters or not?"

"I'll answer that," said Fred—dextrously, I thought, "when I've seen a copy of the game-laws. We're law-abiding men."

The collector handed us a well-thumbed copy of the Red Book.

"They're all in that," he said. "I'll lend it to you, or you can buy one almost anywhere in town. If you decide after reading that to go farther up-country, I'm willing to issue provisional game licenses, subject to confirmation after I've looked into any evidence you care to submit on your own behalf. You can have your guns against a cash deposit——"

"How big?"

"Two hundred rupees for each gun."

Fred laughed. The demand was intended to be away over our heads. The collector bridled.

"But no ammunition," he went on, "until your claim to respectability has been confirmed. By the way, the only claim you've made to me is for the guns. You've told me nothing about yourselves."

"Two hundred a gun?" said Fred. "Counting a pistol or revolver as one? Three guns apiece—nine guns—eighteen hundred rupees deposit?"

The collector nodded.

"Here's a check on the Mombasa Bank for two thousand, and your Government can have as much more again if it wants it," Fred said. "Make me out a receipt, then, and write on it what it's for."

The collector wrote. He was confused, for he had to tear up more than one blank.

"I suppose we get interest on the money at the legal local rate?" asked Fred maliciously.

"I'll inquire about that," said the collector.

"Excuse me," said Fred, "but I'm going to give you some advice. While you're inquiring, look into the antecedents of Lady Isobel Saffren Waldon! It's she who gave out the tip against us. Her tip's a bad one. So is she."

"She hasn't applied for guns or a license," the collector answered tartly. "It's people who want to carry firearms—people able and likely to make trouble—whom we keep an eye on."

"She's more likely to make trouble for you than a burning house!" put in Will Yerkes. "I'm going to let them know in the States what sort of welcome people receive at this port!"

"You came of your own accord. You weren't invited," the collector answered.

"That's a straight-out lie!" snapped Yerkes. "You know it's a lie! Why, there isn't a newspaper in South Africa that hasn't been carrying ads of this country for months past. Why, you've been yelling for settlers like a kid for milk."

"Ivory-hunters are not settlers," the collector answered.

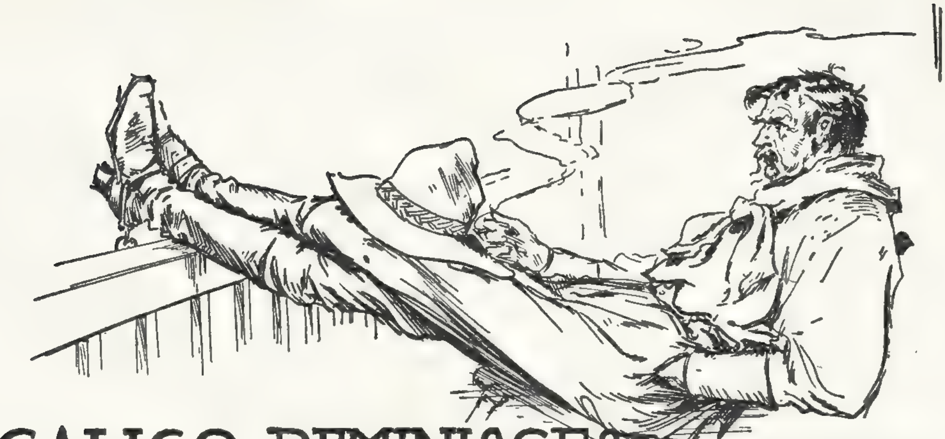
"Who said we're ivory-hunters?" Yerkes was in a fine rage, and Fred and I leaned back to enjoy the official's discomfort. "Besides, your ads bragged about the big game as one of the chief attractions! All the information you can possibly have against us must have come from a female crook in the pay of the German Government! You're not behaving the way gentlemen do where I was raised!"

"There is no intention to offend," said the collector.

"Intention is good!" said Yerkes, laughing in spite of himself.

Fred Oakes yelled with laughter. Still laughing, we walked out into the sunshine.

TO BE CONTINUED



CALICO REMINISCES

By J C Evans

“CALICO” BANGS, veteran prospector — so designated because of a flaming mop of brick-red hair streaked with the white of many desert Winters—spat unerringly at a lizard winking bright-eyed from the dust of Tonopah’s main street. The veteran’s aim was worthy of a better cause.

“Pore little cuss,” grinned Calico, “hydraulicked an’ his hull mornin’ spoiled. ’Pears like some careless ol’ fool’s always aimin’ to fill a feller’s eyes full o’ grief just when the sun’s shinin’ brightest. But that there inseck’ll go jes’ as fur the other way and be all the happier for his set-back in a little while. You’ll see.”

And, as his old eyes wandered retrospectively over the hazy hills of Nevada’s Queen mining-camp, there came to the oldster’s face a boyish grin, mingled with just a trace of sadness.

This was the expression “War-Horse Bill” Rhodes once designated as “the story-tellin’ gawp o’ that ol’ stingin’ lizard—which the same ain’t to be relied on without inside knowin’ o’ precedin’ events.” Yet it was another way of indicating what might be a danger-signal.

Calico for years had trod the desert sands. He had learned to know and love the rougher side of Mother Nature and in his lonely nights beneath star-jewelled skies had formulated a philosophy all his own.

It was a home-made treasure—a thing not to be lightly trundled forth for the derision of the unthinking. But at times there came to his familiars a trace of its motif. Usually the particular tenet set forth was in the form of a tale, the moral of which, sermon-like, grew with its unfolding. So when Calico elevated his boot-shod feet to the railing of the Cooncan Hotel porch, he settled himself for illustration.

“They’s a pat for every slap—a joy for ev’ry sorrer,” he confided to his listener. “The pend’lum swings jes’ as fur one way as it does the other.

“That’s why I’ve kept shaggin’ over the desert twenty years. I knows I’m gettin’ nearer each night to the time when slaps of disappointment turns into love-pats. It’s all ruled out ahead by the Big Mind up there.

“Seein’ that there lizard’s griefs jes’ now reminds me of young Bill Clarke, the young editor ‘Tombstone’ Booth brung up hyer from Californy for his *Bonanza* paper.

“Bill’s wife, as purty a city gal as ever set her dainty feet in desert sand, comes with him. The set-up for them was the same as for that reptile, all sunshine and fair weather for a while. But, before they passes along, ol’ Mister Hard Luck had showered ’em plentiful.”

To interrupt Calico while in the story-telling mood was like pricking a bubble. Silence brought forth this tale.

BILL was what us desert rats would call a wild wolf with a shaggy pelt. He’d come from a fambly of white folks down whar they still calls Northerners carpet-baggers. Bill was a han’some young pup an’ he handled red licker like a juggler does a handful of hoops.

The Clarkes lit into camp in the afternoon. Before mornin' Bill had made a playmate outen every live brother in camp. An', greatest of all, he'd sent Tombstone Booth home to his sorrerin' wife with the finest jag the camp had ever bunged its eyes at. Which the same is remarkin' some on that pertickelar jag. Tombstone is known ordinary for havin' to lay off from work two or three days jes' to get lubricated right for a reg'lar jamboree.

Finally along comes mornin', and young Bill, gazin' mournful-like at the scene of his début, goes up to the *Bonanza* office and perceeds to get out a paper.

The main fack I'm aimin' at is that Bill comes to this here camp bearin' no credentials but his all-fired winnin' ways, and in a few days he's got the hull durned outfit layin' on its back, playin' dead and waitin' for him to kick it, jess like a frien'ly pup.

Which the same is repeated with interest by his wife. She's a cunnin' little ol' rascal. About the time she trips down to the post-offis fust time, all the he-animiles in camp busts away for razors and washbasins. And they shore is a beauty show in Tonopah fer some time subsequent.

Ol' "Malachite George," him as has been around burros so long he has grew to look half like one, gets him a four-bit haircut and comes a-hellin' down-town all lit up like a festival welcome arch. He wears store shoes and a red necktie for the first time in his wicked ol' life.

The rest of the camp takes on a air of caution remindin' one considerable of a politician at a prayer-meetin'.

Street rookuses and shootin' general gets as popular's a he bear at a beehive—all the result of Missis Bill's purty ways. She's jess like a delicate flower a-growin' in a slag-heap.

So the Spring and Summer goes by. Then comes the time when Missis Bill ain't seen about the streets and Bill's drinkin' his licker like it's sour medicine.

One night Doc Corsey holds a bunch of he cards in a game down to the Big Casino and becomes the owner of the biggest pot of the Fall poker season. This results in him taking on lubricants.

He's jess gettin' under way well when Bill sloshes in. He sizes up the layout and with reg'lar Alabama lack of argyment busts Doc on the jaw and sends him off to pick posies in dreamland.

When Doc comes to, Bill tells him cold and mean-like that he's a-settin' into the prohibition game until he—young Bill—gives him permission to leave go all holts and j'ine the simple villagers again in their innercent pleasures.

This kinda gives us ol' coots a line on fambly politics out to the Clarke home. So it ain't a bit surprizin' when "Cinnabar" McGee mills around with his hat, suggestin' donations for the bang-upest mess of baby-fixins to be had down to Reno.

The result ain't what might be called discouragin', for we finds we got four hundred dollars to take up to Missis Hardy, the sheriff's wife, with instructions to go the limit with the mail-order catalog.

Which the same she does. Showin' she ain't left nothin' to the imagination, the freight bill's a few cents more'n forty dollars, which the same I has to go down to the Big Casino and take away from Cinnabar, him bein' the gentlemanly faro-dealer.

Me havin' explained the sense of the meetin' and the lookout bein' asleep, I ain't real surprized when, after bein' whipsawed for a time to humble my proud sperrit, I gets out with exactly forty-one dollars.

A few nights after, when every one's figgerin' on what form of amusement's goin' to require his attention, we hears a hoot up-street and then a series of catamount yawps.

It was young Bill, him without saddle, bridle or hobbles, Doc Corsey in one hand and the fambly bank-roll in the other.

"Come on, yuh brick-headed ol' rhinoceros," he yells at me. "Come on down yere to the Big Casino and imbibe bottled sunshine to the pretties' baby an' the fines' wife a man evah had, suh!"

I certainly do admire to look back on that night. They wasn't a fight in the hull camp. And, when a lot of Slavonians tries to start a rival celebration, we sends a peace mission to 'em, wearin' .45-caliber jewelry on their hands, and calls on 'em to desist. The usual proceedin' is to send a bunch of hard-rock Welsh miners over for social argyment.

Along when conditions is all right and proper, us old shellbacks and desert rats was allowed to go up to the house and see the two of 'em. The little ol' cuss is a girl, and she's got all her mother's sweetness and her daddy's brashness in her pretty face.

"She's jess a lily, smilin' outen a raincloud," her daddy tells us, and I'm bankin' the game that he's oratin' truth.

An' further, I'm jostlin' Truth's elbow when I tell you I blubber like a ol' fool when that dawggone kid hangs on to my trigger-finger—which the same has did its duty noble sev'ral times, pertectin' the usefulness of Calico Bangs, Esquire.

Follerin' our visit, Tombstone Booth struts around like a sparrer on a limb. He purchases stim'lant for everybody and brags pernicious on bein' nominated fer Gawdfather.

Personal, I'd jess' as soon have a scorpion or an anacondy for a sponsor.

The christenin' day is the signal for a tur'ble fallin' off in bar receipts endurin' daylight hours. But, as I says previous, the pend'lum's got to swing so fur back the other way. The evenin' didn't hurt receipts none.

As the months goes by we finds one fly in our social ointment. It's a greaser lawyer that fattened offen them pore benighted girls down to the Casino. They'd git mixed up in some of their sickenin' troubles and, somehow, it always was this here Manuel Gomez as defended them when they was brung before Judge Barnes.

Finally it leaks out that he charges 'em as much for his services as a back-East sassiety woman would want for entertainin' 'em in her home. When they couldn't pay cash he'd take their few miserable belongings.

Yessir, Manuel Gomez lived right up to his Mexican trainin'. But three years passes this-away—three long years of happiness for Bill, Missis Bill an' that durn little Virginia Booth Clarke, which by this time had growed more like a flower than ever.

But more an' more this here Manuel Gomez gets to leavin' a bad taste in the mouths of decent folks. It wasn't noways surprizin' one day, then, when the *Bonanza* comes out with a fust-page editorial tellin' him an' the gen'ral public jes' what kind of a low-down buzzard this Gomez was.

That night Bill's on his way home. A knife whizzes past his ear, narrowly missin' makin' a change in the *Bonanza* pay-roll.

Bill mills around like a puppy after a fly, but it ain't no use. The knife-thrower's missin'.

Next day Bill's dawg, Virgie's best playmate, howls for five minutes and lays down for the rest of time. The dawg is Bill's pet, too, and he goes hawg-wild for a spell.

THROWIN' knives in the dark and poisonin' a friendly pup's a finger pointin' too straight to Manule Gomez to be looked on disdainful. Next day a committee of rope-experts calls on Manuel Gomez, suggestin' a vacation. At the same time we bears down on the fack that six months twicet yearly will suit Tonopah down to the ground.

Gomez packs his grip while we waits. Comin' down the steps, we runs into young Bill, Missis Bill and Virgie. The kid's a-hangin' on to Bill's hand, happy as a canary-filled kitten.

Gomez snarls somethin' in greaser at Missis Bill. None of us makes out what it is, but Cinnabar, him havin' been a prize-fighter, lays the Mex out cold with a wallop to the jaw.

But this don't get Cinnabar nowhere with Virgie. She whimpers like she's been hurt, lets go of Bill's hand and runs to Gomez. She's standin' there lookin' at him when the Mex comes to.

Gomez, he jes' sits up, stares at the kid a spell—and then he smiles, a funny light comin' into his eyes.

Somethin' in the back of my head says to me—

"Calico, you better beef that buzzard right now."

But I don't, and I reckon that's the big sin I got to answer to when I pass over.

We sees Gomez safe on the Reno stage and then sets back for a spell of clean breathin'. Ever notice that's always the time when somethin' busts loose and kicks your doll-house over?

It's just about chow-time next evenin' when Missis Bill comes a-millin' downtown, hatless an' lookin' hopeless right and left. I figgers she's seekin' Bill and offers to cut him outen the herd in the Mint, where he's chattin' with his *amigos* after work.

She's lookin' way off into the distance, though, and jes' brushes by me, straight into the Mint. Bill knows there's somethin' wrong and starts for her. Still lookin' like a sleep-walker, she puts both her little hands in his big ones and says:

"Virgie's gone, Daddy Billy, and she'll never come back."

Then she falls over on the floor. From that she goes into the land of burnin' fever and strange shapes. It's brain-fever and Doc Corsey has got his hands full.

Now Tonopah is going to be a good silver camp when her hills are a good deal rustier than they are now. But she ain't never goin' to see another posse formed as quick as on that day.

Me, I nussed at the breast of Mother Desert, but I'm dummed if I ain't startin' off without water when Sheriff Hardy says—

"Two days food and water for all—for use skimpin'."

First of all we goes to young Bill's house. On the steps was Virgie's doll, the same which I'd gave her after her fav'rite had succumbed to a operation Virgie'd performed with her ma's scissors.

Over a near-by rise we finds her little sunbonnet. Worse, we finds a mess of tracks where a hoss had stood for hours.

Somebody hollered "Gomez" and my hand streaked to the butt of my .45 like it ought to have streaked the night before when I see that funny light in Gomez' eyes as Virgie stood in sorrer over him.

We're in the saddle and ridin' hell-fer-leather in another minute.

The trail's plain. It leads us out into a big north and east circle. The tracks shows the hoss ain't bein' held back none to speak of. Bill's a-ridin' up ahead with the sheriff, sayin' nothin' but white about the mouth.

Two hours later the desert night comes down in a flash, and we starts doin' our trailin' afoot.

We takes turn-about watchin' sign and are making some progress when we hears a hoss go poundin' off like mad.

We counts noses and discovers Bill's missin'. He's went off to play Justice by himself—blinders and all. We tries to stop him, but it ain't no use.

Therefore we returns to the job of trailin' Gomez's hoss. When sun-up come, Bill's tracks is lost entire. We're all tired and stiff, but every man-jack in the outfit tops his hoss and goes tearin' off on the trail, which is growin' plainer with each minute of light.

Soon the trail turns off toward the north. Everybody cusses deep down in his system, for we knows then the greaser's made for the Malpais—the desert bad-lands.

Tain't give to us old desert buzzards to have second sight more'n once in our lives—but it was unanimous that mornin'. Any one could see Gomez had planned to take pore little Virgie out into them bad-lands, leavin' her for the sun and thirst to get at their leisure.

We holds war-council. Six of the gang divides offen the main band and heads air-line for the Malpais, leavin' the rest to trail the tracks. By this time the sun's scorchin' like a burnin'-glass. The hosses, which the same ain't no dromedaries, is sufferin' too.

Along about nine o'clock, when we're gettin' into the sand-rises leading to the bad-lands, there comes a sound of shots from off to the east. They ain't no way of locating sounds in the desert so fur's distance is concerned; but, knowin' it ain't the way the rest of the gang has went, we goes pilin' over for a look-see.

We makes it over two rises, and, as we tops the third, a strange black hoss nickers and comes trottin' over to us. He's been ridden hard. The sheriff rides down into the arroyo and lets out a yell; we follers like a band of sheep.

Thar in the sand, deader'n a door-nail, lies Gomez, shot five times by the gun young Bill's still holdin' in his hand.

Yep, you guessed it. Daddy-love had took young Bill straight to this greaser scorpion when trailin' couldn't.

But it's here we gets our first setback. For Bill's layin' in the sand, a-tryin' his durndest to die before we can do him some good.

We reads sign automatic-like and sees where two hosses has been pulled up six paces from one another—also, where Gomez has hit the ground and rolled over once.

Gomez musta threw his knife at young Bill, catchin him full in the throat, for there's blood on the saddle and a pool in the sand.

But the stout heart of the boy had stood him true, for he nailed the greaser in a straight line from his chin to his stomach—five real hits.

A little bandagin' and water and Bill shows they's life in him yet. While we're riggin' up a sling between two hosses to get him back to town and Doc Corsey, he opens his eyes and says—

"Where's Virgie, fellows?"

"——!" grates out the sheriff, lookin'

round at us standin' there like a passel of ol' maids learnin' to play poker.

But Virgie wa'n't nowhere about, and we can tell from the pleadin' look in Bill's eyes that she ain't with Gomez when Bill comes up on him.

CINNABAR McGEE, "Brocky" Collins—from the Tonopah Queen mine—and "Red" Murphy's detailed to get Bill back to town. He's mighty close to the edge of the big slide—which the same ain't a happy prospect none for his friends.

When they're gone, we tops our hosses again and begins ridin' the big circle, hopin' against hope that Gomez had hid Virgie somewhere when he sees Bill a-comin'. We don't overlook a bunch of sage-brush bigger'n a hat and are gettin' dawggone peevish when we heard six shots fired slow-like from to'ds the bad-lands.

We recognizes it as the signal from the gang that had left at sun-up; we knows they've found sign of Virgie, and we gets on our way sudden.

Sure enough, after a few minutes hard ridin' we sees them drawed up in a circle where they has run into Gomez's returnin' tracks.

When we comes up, we finds ol' Chet Briggs a-holdin' up a yellow silk hank'chief. Them bein' popular with greasers, the boys is dead sure they've hit the right track. Likewise the trail's fresh. It's easy for us to know then that Gomez has taken Virgie to the bad-lands and is on his way back when him and Bill meets up.

"Let's go," grunts Sheriff Hardy, slammin' his cayuse over the head with his sombrero.

Away we pelts, hell-fer-leather. We watches sign a little on the backtrail, but keeps our hosses' attention pintedly on the task of gettin' whar they is headed.

Less than an hour brings us to the edge of the Malpais.

Ef you ain't never been there, son, count your life full enough without it. Like Tonopah and Goldfield—which the same was discovered by George Wingfield—lots of the country round about was pitched up from the middle of the earth when some volcano turned to for a good day's work.

Looks to me that volcanoes, like some people, gets rid of what ain't no use to them. And take it from me, what ain't no use to a volcano ain't no use to nobody—if the Malpais is a sample.

Them bad-lands was the prize package of all. They was rocks and more rocks. These was covered in spots with drifted sand—all of it qualified to be known as the home votin'-precinck for half of the rattlers in Nevady.

They wasn't one of us that didn't go plum squeamish, thinkin' of little Virgie out thar in that hell-hole, maybe alive and sufferin'—maybe dead at the hands of that ornery greaser.

We scatters out and begins the hunt, each one afraid he's goin' to be the one to find the pore child's little body. Over rocks we scrambles, paddlin' through the sand and lookin' as intent as if we was seekin' a watch instead of a three-year-old gal.

It was Tombstone Booth that found her, an' I hope t' Gawd I can live the rest of my life without seein' a similar sight.

For Tombstone shore stands and groans in man agony.

Thar was Virgie in the shade of a rock, where she'd crawled after bein' dropped by Gomez. She's sleepin', a-whimperin' soft-like to herself, and her purty baby face is scorched redder'n a brick by the sun.

But that ain't what has paralyzed Tombstone and the rest of us.

Right in front of her, coiled and weavin' back and forth in time with her breathin'—ready to strike if the kiddie moved a finger—was a hell-tootin' big diamond-back rattler. And, son, they shore is bad medicine in Summer.

We knowed the least sound would send the poison-fangs home—and then good-by Virgie.

Then it was that Tombstone takes on his duties as Gawd-father.

The sweat was standin' in big drops on his forehead as he reaches for his .45, but in the eyes of the sinful ol' fool was a light it done my heart good to see.

He brings the muzzle down slow-like, and it's waverin'. I sees his lips move, and I knows he's prayin'.

Maybe there's somethin' in such prayer. Sudden his hand steadies and there comes the roar of his ol' weapon.

The snake's head jes' seems to fly to pieces. Tombstone drops his gun and starts on the dead run for Virgie. The rest of us trails along to the place where Virgie, roused by the sound of the shot, is sittin' up, tryin' to piece things together.

Tombstone's first, and—I say it to his credit—he's weepin' like a recent widow when he takes his Gawd-child in his arms like he ain't never goin' to let her go again.

"You might make a bigger hit with the young lady, pervidin' you give her some water," growls the sheriff sarcastical-like.

Virgie gets a little swig from Tombstone's canteen and nestles down in his arms. She don't even pay no attention when he moistens his hank'chief with water and washes the alkali outen the corners of her mouth.

Then we makes ready to start back for town, happiness and sorrer minglin' equal. Of course, we've got Virgie back safe and sound, but they's no way of knowin' how Virgie's maw is, or whether Bill's goin' to win his fight with the feller with the scythe.

As we starts, we notices Chet Briggs' hoss standin' alone. We looks around and here's Chet pilin' up rocks as fast as Nature'll let him.

"Plumb locoed," comments "Blinky" Kelly, which had forsook his perch on Grant Crumley's bar-rail long enough to join the posse. "The ol' fool's so tickled at findin' Virgie, he's goin' to file a location on the spot. Somebody lasso him and bring him along."

"What doin', Chet?" Hardy yells. "Goin' to start a rattlesnake farm?"

Chet's dignified as a Meth'dist at a dance when he straightens up, walks over and hands somethin' to Hardy.

"Ef it's any of your business," he snorts, "I'll tell you I'm locatin' the Virgie silver-lead mine, which the same's come under my notice since Tombstone's bullet knocked the corner offen that ledge thar. Of course," he continues sarcastic, "my eyes ain't right good, but I'm tellin' you this here's a trust which has descended complete on to Tonopah fer some time—pervidin' Virgie's paw and maw don't get well. Am I oratin' sense?"

We don't stop to argue but forks our hosses and pelts back to Tonopah; Tombstone's carryin' Virgie, and she's sleepin' sound.

Our entry into town's quite a event. Most everybody exceptin' the Mexican population is out to meet us. The eight laborers of greaser blood, we learns, has left camp to avoid being cut off in their prime. You see, the news of Bill's hurts and how he came by 'em has spread promiscuous.

We finds young Bill's in the company hospital, showin' a pleasin' disposition to get well. The knife had missed the big arteries, and Doc Corsey has did a good job of patchin'.

While Missis Hardy is grabbin' Virgie and takin' her home, other admirin' villagers is bringin' us foamin' thirst-quenchers and demandin' to be let in on the story.

When we finishes, there's a general desire to go out, round up them missin' greasers and show 'em how the pig et the cabbage. But Hardy sets his foot down hard. We end by barrin' Mexicans from the camp for all time. So far's I see, the rule still holds good.

THERE Calico's reminiscent mood ended. Grinning, he pointed to the lizard, now sunning itself on a bit of plank, switching its tail in lazy content and apparently oblivious to its wrongs of a half-hour before.

"That there animile," said Calico, "has got the right system—which the same is: Take things as they come and forget your troubles emphatic-like."

"Yes, yes," I interrupted impatiently. "But Bill—Virgie—Mrs. Clarke——"

"Yep," guffawed Calico, "reckoned you'd want to know about them.

"Bill got well in a hurry, and, when Missis Bill recovers from the fever—well, believe me, son, they was a reg'lar reunion then."

Again Calico fell into reverie.

"But the mine—" I prompted.

"Tee-hee!" the old reprobate giggled as I rose to the bait. "To be sure—you wanta know about the mine. Well—it was pyrites of the worst kind. They wasn't a cent of value anywhere. That half-blind ol' Briggs had went off at half-cock as usual.

"But we does him honor at that—we calls the Malpais 'Briggsville' to this day in honor of its discoverer."

FINGERS OF HOME

By Clyde B Hough

Author of "Two Calls in the Jungle," "Better So," etc.

DONALD WELLING stood, half-leg deep, in the crystal water of a mountain stream, his trousers rolled to above the knees, and swung a wooden tray in a half-circular motion. After a little, he stopped and ran his fingers through the dirt at the bottom of the tray; then he dumped it out and climbed up the bank, disgusted. The sun was just making its daily descent into the China Sea, and another creek-bed prospect had proved a disappointment.

Welling was a rangy, steel-muscled son of Texas. His partner was Jackson Greggins, a Californian with a bull neck and shoulders and biceps to match. During their first civilian days in the Philippines, Welling and Greggins thought proudly of themselves as soldiers of fortune. They even spoke of things in the States, as "Back in the old country."

The two men had requested and received their discharges at Vigan, where their respective terms of enlistment expired early in the Summer of 1902. Then they had gone, at once, into the Banguet Mountains, the highest peaks of which are about thirty miles from Vigan. Gold was their object, and in all the islands the Banguet region was the most likely place to prospect. In these mountains the streams cut deepest, flowed fastest, afforded the greatest number of pockets and elbows wherein dust and nuggets were apt to be deposited by the rushing waters.

Exactly five months had now passed since the big Californian and the lanky Texan swaggered out of Vigan with their prospecting outfits strapped to their shoulders. And these had been five revealing months for the partners. Their heart-strings no longer vibrated to the lure of the big strike; they no longer believed that the big strike was just around the corner of time. And, when a prospector loses this illusion, for him prospecting has been reduced to plain, manual labor.

To be sure, the partners found some gold, but never enough to raise their earnings above the par of wages. And each had long known that he was sick with longing to stand on the deck of a ship and bathe his eyes in the lights of San Francisco. But not for worlds would either of them have admitted to the other what he considered his weakness. Nothing could have induced either man to be the one to propose going home. That would have branded him a quitter.

That afternoon, after Welling had dumped his tray and climbed out of the stream disgusted, he stood for a while looking moodily out to where the sun was meeting the ocean—the ocean that lay between him and home. Then he turned and walked up-stream some fifty yards to where Greggins was cooking their supper. The tall man stretched his long legs on the ground a little distance from the fire and leaned back on one elbow. Greggins continued his cooking, and neither one spoke. In fact, of late silence between them had come to be the rule rather than the exception.

Had they been asked, neither one could have told why this was the case; they had not quarreled as yet. Nevertheless, each felt, although unbeknown to himself, that the other was responsible for these long, irritating silences. As a matter of fact, had either of them taken the trouble to analyze, he would have known that he was blaming the other because he himself was not on his way to the States. And yet it was his own weakness—the weakness of each—that kept him from telling the other his desire.

Greggins turned the bacon in the skillet, poured some cold water in the coffee to settle it and attempted to whistle. But the whistle, unmusical, trailed off into silence. Greggins was thinking of his beloved San Francisco—of cool, moonlit nights on the sand by the Cliff House, the waves booming at his feet—of golden Sundays and picnics at Shellmound Park, across the bay.

Welling drew a thick, black plug from his pocket, shaved off several thin slices, ground them between his hands and packed them into a clay pipe that was wound with twine and coated with shellac. Then he squirmed around, reached a burning brand from the fire and lit up. But, somehow, he derived little satisfaction from his cherished pipe and, after a few intermittent puffs, the clouds of smoke grew smaller and smaller till finally the pipe was laid aside. Welling was dreaming of San Antonio, of sobbing guitars, of wonderful evenings in Alamo Plaza and more wonderful girls in white.

Truly the fingers of home had reached across the Pacific and clutched the hearts of two lonely men.

"Grub's ready," announced Greggins with a noticeable effort to make his voice cheerful.

Welling drew up to where his partner had arranged the bacon, hardtack and coffee, and the two men ate for some minutes without further speech.

"The yellow has petered out down there, Jackson," said Welling at last. "What's the size of our wad this time?"

Greggins drew a buckskin poke from the front of his shirt, tossed it up lightly and caught it in his hand, carefully judging the weight.

"I estimate about four hundred dollars there," he said, glancing at the poke of dust. "How much cash you got, Don?"

Welling reached beneath his shirt and unfastened and drew out the belt which he wore next to his skin. From one compartment he took a roll of bills, from another some gold-pieces and from several others a quantity of Spanish *pesos*.

"Three hundred and eight-five," said Welling when he had counted the lot. "We started with four hundred apiece, eight hundred dollars. And, if you've guessed the weight of that poke right, we've got seven hundred and eighty-five now, fifteen dollars behind. But I reckon that's not so bad. We were down to two hundred when we quit that prospect over near Baguio."

"That's right," said Greggins, "and this is the nearest we've come to being even since we bought our outfits in Vigan."

With a little diplomacy on Welling's part at this point, the subject uppermost in both their minds might have been broached. But Welling chose not to answer his partner's last remark, and another long silence ensued.

"Bacon's about out, Don," said Greggins when they had finished eating. "Think we'd better go into Baguio tomorrow and stock up before we start looking for another prospect?"

"Jackson," said Welling, "what do you say if we lay off for a couple of weeks and go down to Vigan? It'll do us good to see a few white faces once more."

"Suits me," said Greggins, more pleased than he cared to show.

Sunrise the next morning found the partners on their way to Vigan and a break in the long monotonous months just passed. Even now each noted in the other a certain jubilance of spirit that had been absent for many weeks. All morning they held down the steep mountainsides, sometimes swinging from crag to crag with the agility of born natives. At noon the fierce sun forced them to seek shade, where they ate and rested until three o'clock. Then they traveled again until dark. The second day was a repetition of the first, and evening saw Greggins and Welling, elbows on the bar, in the Wild Horse saloon in Vigan.

Now, ordinarily, Greggins and Welling were not drinking men. Either of them could have counted on the fingers of one hand the number of times that he had been drunk. But on this particular night it was to be expected that they would celebrate in the universal way that men do. They did.

IN THE Wild Horse saloon that night there were soldiers, civilian packers and a few sailors from a small inter-island steamer that was anchored about two miles offshore—the water was too shallow for a boat of any size to get closer. Some of the soldiers were red-cheeked boys, just out from the States and not yet tanned, but some others were old-timers whom Greggins and Welling knew well. Among the latter, several were time-expired and they were leaving in three days on the little steamer for Manila, the first leg of their journey home.

Between the partners and these it was a sort of combination reunion and farewell. Every one was spinning money on the bar and clamoring for a chance to buy. The drinks flowed in a steady stream and at 1 A.M., when the Wild Horse closed, it was not without help that Greggins and Welling made their way to their room above the saloon. As for the soldiers, they locked arms in sets of fours—that being the surest way—and charged their quarters *en masse*.

Had the partners stopped at the one spree they might not have quarreled. But they did not stop. At twelve the next day they stood before the bar and toned up the taste in their mouths; then they went across the street to Sing Lee's restaurant and made faces at ham and eggs which they could not eat, although it was the first chance they had had at such a meal in five months. From the restaurant they went over to the barracks to see their friends.

The home-going men laughed and joked about the times they would have and the things they would do when they reached the States. All of which was not good for two homesick men. The very coming to Vigan and the seeing of white faces again had whetted their desire for home; but this rubbing shoulders with home-going friends was maddening. That night Greggins and Welling not only drank, but they bucked Emilio's monte game—and Emilio was some monte-dealer.

It was near noon the next day when the two men awoke. After the consumption of much ice-water, and various sulfurous remarks interspersed with groans, they counted their cash.

"Four hundred," said Welling, who was doing the counting. "We got away with three hundred and eighty-five dollars."

"Well, don't blame me," snapped Greggins.

"Who's blaming you?" asked the other. "All the same you lost more than I did."

The men were both sick from the night's debauch, and their tempers bad. A quarrel followed, they divided the remainder of their funds, and Welling packed his personal belongings and found other quarters.

Naturally, this upheaval of their long-set relations was disturbing, and, as a result, they drank more the third night than at any time before. But up until ten o'clock each made a point of avoiding the other.

However, by that hour both men were liquored to a state of viciousness. So, when Welling walked into the shack where Emilio, the Filipino, ran his monte game and laid a twenty-*peso* bet, his leer at Greggins was a positive challenge, and the snarl from his erstwhile partner was no less hostile.

"Why come nosing around me?" asked Greggins. "I'm not stuck on seeing that pie face of yours."

These remarks were insignificant in themselves, the prating of an alcohol-inflamed brain, and meant nothing; but Welling's brain also was inflamed, and to him they were deadly insults; he felt that they called for immediate resentment. The right hand of each man moved toward his holster simultaneously. But friends were between them before either could draw. Then Emilio, seeing the condition of the two, insisted that their guns be placed on the table beside himself before he would proceed with the game. Both Welling and Greggins objected to this arrangement at first but finally agreed when they realized that the Filipino was going to stand firm.

It was well that this precaution was taken, for each of the men continued to jeer at the other, and before midnight they were rolling on the floor and grappling for each other's throats. Again friends parted them. They were sobered to some extent by the struggle, but each was convinced that his manhood had been offended—that, unless he demanded a decisive encounter, he would lose the respect of all present. A duel was mentioned by one and promptly agreed to by the other.

The details were left to an American bartender and a civilian packer, while Greggins and Welling went to their separate quarters. The bartender was an ex-pugilist and the packer an ex-cowboy. When it came to choosing weapons, the cowboy insisted on revolvers and the prize-fighter on boxing-gloves. This controversy almost ended in a second duel, but it was finally agreed to consult the original principals.

Welling proclaimed for cavalry sabers, but stipulated that the duel take place in a roped arena of six-foot dimensions. Otherwise, he said, Greggins would make it a foot-race. To this insinuation Greggins answered that he preferred dynamite. Each man to be given six sticks and both to be locked in one small room. The nonsense was at last stopped, and an agreement was reached when Danny Shea, owner of the Wild Horse, suggested that the partners put out to sea in open boats and fight it out to suit themselves.

After the carrying back and forth of various messages, complimentary and otherwise—mostly otherwise—it was learned that a duel in open boats would be satisfactory to both parties. Then the packer and the bartender locked themselves in the back room of the Wild Horse and worked out the details.

Meantime Greggins and Welling spent the fore part of the next day sleeping off the effects of the night before. And, left to themselves, they seemed inclined to so spend the whole day. However, they were finally persuaded to leave their beds and open hostilities. By this time all Vigan, except the authorities—and they were blissfully ignorant of the affair—had set its heart upon witnessing the unique battle.

At one o'clock that afternoon Vigan began drifting down to the beach, first by twos, then in groups and finally in crowds. Even the time-expired soldiers were there. The little steamer was to sail at four o'clock, and every one should have been aboard. But the home-going soldiers had bribed the coxswain of the cutter to remain ashore a while longer so that they could witness the duel.

AT HALF-PAST one Greggins and Welling seated themselves each in a small native boat. Each man had one revolver, fifty rounds of ammunition and one small dagger. The daggers had been added to the armament of the duelists as an afterthought when a question was raised as to what should be done if their ammunition was spent without a result. The men had received full instructions from the two seconds and Danny Shea, who was to act as master of ceremonies.

Danny raised his revolver and fired a single shot into the air. Simultaneously with the shot both paddles cut the water, and the boats, about ten feet apart, leaped out to the westward. They paddled in that direction steadily for ten minutes. Then Danny fired another single shot. Instantly Greggins changed his course to due south and Welling turned north. Thus they pulled directly away from each other for ten minutes, when Shea fired another single shot. This was the ending of his duties, the final signal—and the war was on. From that moment there were no more rules to govern the combatants, and any ruse or any subterfuge was to be considered fair.

When the final shot had been fired, the men were about a mile apart. Greggins immediately turned his boat in the direction of Welling and, crouching low, began to paddle toward his opponent, but Welling turned westward. He was making for a short stretch of reef which was about three feet below the surface of the water in his vicinity. His object was to gain this reef ahead of Greggins.

Greggins was quick to discern the other's intention; he strained every muscle and soon came within range and began firing. Welling made no attempt to answer these shots. He merely bent lower and paddled harder. The distance was too great for Greggins' aim to be effective, and Welling succeeded in reaching the reef. Here he stepped out of the boat and on to the coral. Standing waist-deep in water, he held the boat between him and Greggins as a sort of breastwork and began to answer the other's shots.

Greggins, on the other hand, had wasted considerable of his ammunition in useless firing; so he crouched in his boat and carefully paddled closer until he came within effective range. He knew it was effective range because one of Welling's bullets split the paddle just below his hand. After that the affair became a rapid interchange of shots, a case of shoot and duck and shoot again. The sun was extremely hot and glared on the water, making accurate shooting next to impossible. Neither of the combatants had any way of knowing how it was with his opponent or how near was the end. It was a high-tension business with no advice and no encouragement, but neither of them had any notion of giving up.

The battle had been going on for perhaps twenty minutes when Welling ceased firing. Greggins waited to see if this was a ruse. But there was no move or sound from Welling. After several minutes Greggins was inclined to withdraw and go ashore, but, on second thought, he decided to make sure that the other was actually finished. Yes, he must make sure; he had only a couple of cartridges left, and, if he went ashore and Welling was still alive, the crowd would think that he, Greggins, had quit when his ammunition was running out because he had no stomach for the hand-to-hand knife-work that would follow.

Lying flat in the bottom of his boat, Greggins carefully undressed, slipped over the opposite side from Welling and let himself into the water. Then, hanging to the gunwale with one hand, holding his revolver in the other and swimming with his feet, he propelled his own boat slowly toward the other one. As he drew nearer and there was no shot fired, he began to think that he had killed Welling. And, as soon as he began to think this, he began to have a troublesome feeling.

It no longer seemed that the most important thing in the world was the killing of Welling. In fact, the thought that he had killed Welling was strangely disagreeable. Meantime he was drawing ever closer to the other's boat. However, in order to avoid being caught off his guard, he circled slowly around until he was on the opposite side of the boat, where he should have seen Welling standing if he were alive. But Welling was nowhere to be seen. Then Greggins climbed into his own boat and paddled alongside of the other.

His former partner was not in the boat—nor was he lying on the reef just under the boat. This latter fact struck Greggins as strange until he remembered that the boat would have drifted a little after it was released. Then he began looking along the reef and had not gone far before he spied the object of his search.

Greggins, no doubt, would have shot Welling had he merely seen the latter's head just above water, as it was. However, he had paddled so close before seeing his opponent at all that now he was able to look into the clear water and see the other's predicament plainly. Welling's legs were drawn tightly against the side of the reef, held there immovable by the encircling tentacles of a large squid, or octopus. By the size of the tentacles which he saw about his friend's legs, he judged the squid would measure eight or ten feet from tip to tip.

Greggins learned later that Welling, in his excitement when he found himself encoiled by the octopus, had dropped his gun and dagger. Both weapons had fallen clear of the reef and gone to the bottom, fathoms below. And now with both hands Welling was pressing downward against the upper edge of the reef with all his strength, thus keeping his nose above water. It was easy to understand that he could not hold out many moments longer against the powerful monster that was slowly pulling him down.

Upon seeing Welling in this predicament, Greggins instantly forgot that he had come out to accomplish exactly what the squid was now doing. Only one thing was paramount in his mind: that his partner was in peril.

Stripped as he was, Greggins picked up the small dagger which lay in the bottom of his boat, slipped into the water and, holding to the reef with his left hand, thrust his right hand down along one of the tentacles that was around his friend's legs. Guided by that, he reached the central part, or body, of the octopus. This he jabbed and slashed rapidly with the dagger. Excited by the pain of these wounds, the octopus thrust out wildly with three tentacles, one of which it wound about Greggins' right arm before he could withdraw it. The other two were coiled about his legs. Greggins felt the powerful strength of the thing almost crushing him against the reef, but he knew it could not last long. Some of his many stabs with the dagger were bound to have reached a vital spot in the monster.

At this juncture Welling became unconscious and his head fell under water. Greggins raised his partner's head with his left hand and waited. Presently he felt the tentacles begin to release, and finally, of themselves, they dropped from both men. The octopus was dead.

Somehow, Greggins dragged his partner into the boat, hung his head over the gunwale and began working his arms to restore respiration. After an incredible amount of water had been forced from Welling's lungs, Greggins was rewarded by a slight quiver of the other's nostrils. A few minutes more and Welling sat up weakly in the bottom of the boat. Then without a word Greggins took up his paddle and started to paddle shoreward.

AFTER a little both men noticed the cutter which belonged to the little steamer leaving the beach. The home-going soldiers were starting on their way. Welling looked from the cutter to the steamer, and, as he turned his head, Greggins caught his gaze. Their eyes met, and without words each admitted to the other that which he had so long tried to conceal.

Greggins nodded shoreward.

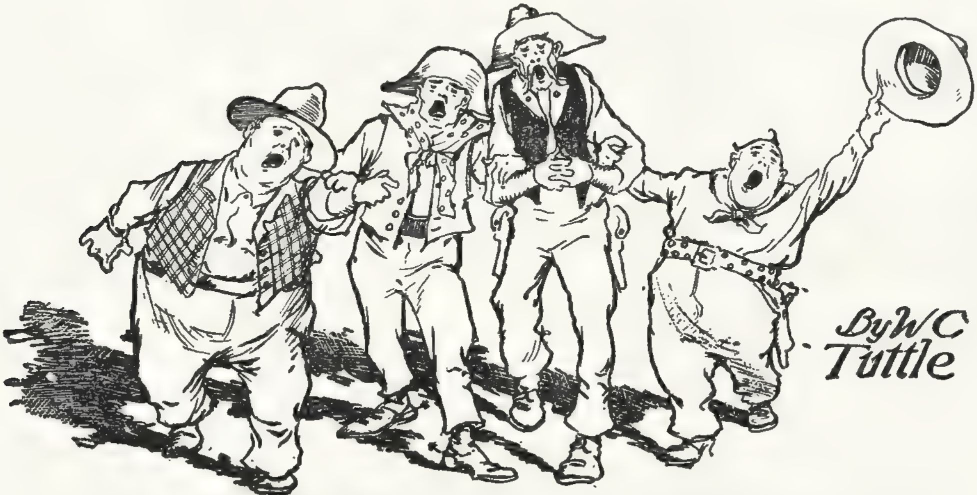
"Want anything back there, Don?" he asked.

"Not a thing," answered Welling.

Greggins pulled on his clothes, adjusted the long stern oar which natives use to guide their boats and once more took up his paddle.

"You steer her, Don," he said.

And Don steered her—toward the little steamer.



By W C Tuttle

DIRTY WORK FOR DOUGHGOD

Author of "For the Parson of Paradise," "Jay Bird's Judgment," etc.

"NO, SIR," says Mike Pelly. "No more female teachers for Paradise. 'Cause why? 'Cause all the fool punchers fall in love with her and ruin her educational qualities—that's why. We don't no more than get a she teacher, until all the saddle-slickers around here quit working and prevents her from teaching the young idea how to shoot straight."

"This here miss, who writes me from Great Falls, orates that she's the goods," states "Doughgod" Smith. "She slings a good hand."

"Let her sling it—in Great Falls," says Mike. "As chairman of the Board of Trustees of Paradise, I hereby open and above board objects to anything but a male teacher."

"I places my bet with yours," says J. B. Whittaker, owner of the Cross J outfit. "Women has always been the bane of my existence, and in a case like this I opens my mouth like a wolf and openly howls for a man. *Lignum vitæ.*"

"*E pluribus unum,*" says Mike, and the session is over.

Me and "Chuck" Warner sets there on the saloon steps and listens to those words of wisdom. Chuck wiggles his ears a lot at the decision and watches them adjourn for a drink.

"Confounded old coots," says Chuck sadlike. "Only one of them is married, and he ain't got no kids. I don't blame Mike for harboring resentment against the weaker sex—after seeing his wife, but them other two loveless lunatics ain't got no cause to boycott calico for educational purposes. I figured on a woman teacher, Henry."

"You and me both," says I. "According to fiction, a puncher has to fall in love with a school-teacher."

Old Doughgod Smith wanders out and comes over to us, wiping his mustache.

"You're three lovely old joy-killers, Doughgod," says Chuck. "Regular old race-suiciders."

"Now, now, Chuck," says Doughgod, setting down with us. "Don't blame me. It's two against one, and I'm the one. Also, I'm sort of up against it. I didn't know them snake-huntin' cohorts of mine were so bitter against women—honest to gosh! That Miss—" Doughgod scratched his head—"I don't know her name right now—well, she sounds on paper like a regular teacher; so I told her to come and take the job. She's on her way now, and I don't know how to head her off."

"Two ways out," states Chuck. "Either shoot J. B. or Mike and get a warm-hearted man in their place, or meet the train and send her back from whence she comes."

"Meet her at the train? Me? Not Doughgod Smith! Not me, Chuck. I got rheumatism in the vocal cords when it comes to denying a female anything. I can stand without hitching long enough to meet a lady in a crowd, but I don't walk right up and speak to one. Reckon I'll have to pay her way back."

"I could meet her if I was properly coaxed," observes Chuck. "Me—I ain't scared of no female woman."

"Would you do that, Chuck?" asks Doughgod anxious-like. "Honestly, would you?"

"Yeah. Give me the money for the ticket."

"By grab, Chuck, you and me are friends for life. Here's twenty. I don't know what the ticket costs, but I ain't asking questions. If she asks for me, you tell her—what'll you tell her?"

"I never rehearse, Doughgod. I'll tell her something—you gamble on that."

Doughgod wanders away, hugging himself, so me and Chuck buys a drink. We meets "Muley" Bowles and "Telescope" Tolliver, and Chuck tells them about the trustee meeting.

"That's a danged shame," states Telescope. "This here country is pining for the touch of a woman's gentle hand. Now, when she shows up, we got to tell her to pilgrim along. Just 'cause them two old, dried-up specimens don't want women, it ain't no reason why we don't."

"Dogs in a manger," says Muley, shaking his fat face until it wobbles. Muley had had about enough cheer for a fat man, and he ain't none too secure on his feet. "As the poet would shay:

"Drink to me only with thy eyes,
  Oh, women, lovely women,
If I hadn't washed las' Shummer
  I'd like to go in schwimmin'."

"Muley, you're making light of a dark subject," chides Telescope.

"This is a case of two old pelicans trying to cut the sentiment out of the cow business, and we've got to frustrate it. *Sabe?*"

"Shentiment?" asks Muley serious-like. "This is my shentiments:

"Love is a fleeting flower
  That fleeted away from me,
Like a tumble-weed in a cyclone
  Adrift on a Wintry sea.
Where are the loves of yesterday
  That made my heart so light?
Gone like the howl of a coyote
  That was howled at the moon last night.

"That's shentiment," says Muley. "Deep from the heart. Who's going to the dance at the Triangle tonight, eh?"

"Dances is secondary to the main issue," says Telescope judicial-like, "and poetry is incidental. We must contemplate deep and act as our better natures dictates."

Muley Bowles is a self-made poet. Something inside that two-hundred-and-forty-pound carcass seems to move him to rime, and nothing can stop him. He's so heavy in a saddle that all of his broncs are bowed in the legs and run their shoes over awful.

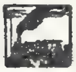
Telescope Tolliver came from down in the moonshine belt, and he's got some strange and awful ideas of what constitutes a code of honor. He's so long in the legs that a bronc has to pitch twice at the same time to get him high enough to throw.

Chuck Warner is a Roman-nosed puncher, with the shortest legs on record and the trusting eyes of a bird-dog. According to all we can find out, Chuck is a titled person. Of course, being an ordinary puncher, he don't wish to have folks know him as anything but just plain Chuck, but the title remains just the same—Ananias the Second. I won't go so far as to say that he can't tell the truth, but I will insist that he won't.

Me—I'm Henry Clay Peck. I play the banjo cheerfully, take my baths on the same day of every month and do what I'm told. I can't blame nor credit anybody but me for what I am.

The four of us punches cows for the Cross J, draw down forty a month and spend our leisure time trying to figure out how old J. B. Whittaker ever got so much talent together in one bunch. We sure make a pretty good quartette for singing. We've got one tenor and three other voices.

We hives up around Mike Pelly's bar that day and sings songs until Chuck suggests that we better go down to the depot and see if the lady comes in. We've got several trains a day; so it's up to us to see 'em all. The train ain't in yet; so we sings a few more songs. After a while the train comes in—but no lady. Muley starts an argument with the conductor over it, but the conductor is a big, mean-looking person; we takes Muley away from him and sets him on a truck.



THE train pulls out, and on the far side of the track stands a female. She must have got off on the wrong side. She sure is fair to look upon, and Muley falls off the truck when he tries to take off his hat to her.

"Ma'am," says Telescope, bowing and trying to take off the hat he's already got in his hand, "ma'am, the town is on this side."

"Oh," says she and then stares at us.

"Her hair was gug-golden, and her lips was blue.
Her eyes was sweeter than the morning dew.
Her nose was like sea-shells, and her ears was pug——

"And I'd like to assassinate Mike Pelly and J. B. Whittaker—honest to gosh!" says Muley, still on his hands and knees with his hat down over one eye.

"Ma'am, it sure pains me to tell you this, but—you've got to go right back where you came from," says Chuck sad-like. "Honestly."

"Go back?" she gasps, and Chuck nods.

"Yes'm. You've got to. Not on our account, ma'am, but there seems to be a sentiment against women. One of them says that women is the banes of his existence, and the other says that—aw, Telescope, you talk a little. I ain't going to stand here all day arguing with a perfect lady."

"You heard him say it, ma'am," agrees Telescope. "They're against a woman. Now if you was a—wait a minute! Gosh, lady, I got a hy-iu scheme. We'll slip one over on the women-haters."

Telescope grabs her by the arm, and the lady acts mystified-like.

"I—I don't understand," says she. "I—I——"

"This ain't no time or place to settle it," says Telescope. "Come on, everybody."

"That's all right, ma'am," says Muley, taking hold of her other arm. "You can trust Telescope—as long as me and Chuck and Hen are along to protect you. Where we going, Telescope?"

"We'll leave our broncs here and take the buckboard," says Telescope.

"The old man is in a poker game by this time, and he won't need it."

"I asked you in a lady-like manner to tell me where we're going," says Muley. "Is it a secret, Telescope?"

"I'll explain when we get there, Muley," he replies.

The four of us helps the lady into the buckboard, while them two roan broncs dance a jig against the hitching-rack. The lady acts scared stiff, but that's natural under these circumstances.

"I'll drive," proclaims Telescope. "The lady sets in the middle, and Muley on the end. You other two can set in the back or get your broncs."

"Your statement shows lack of consideration and fine thought," states Chuck. "I am going to ride on that seat. *Sabe?*"

"Nominations being in order, I'll speak a word or two in favor of old man Peck's son, Henry," says I. "I don't care a whoop who drives, but I'll say right here that Henry Clay Peck is the third member of the seat-riders."

All of which makes it hard to arrive at a peaceful solution. Telescope's idea of a proper argument is to slam his sombrero on the ground and talk at the top of his voice. Naturally this aggravates said touchy team, with the result that they casts domestication to the four winds and whales off up the street with the fair one all alone on the seat and the lines dragging.

"Who in —— untied them animals?" yelps Muley.

"Which ain't nothing but a question,"

replies Chuck, throwing down the two halters in disgust. "Come on and let's get our broncs. She's due to get killed in about a minute."

The four of us lopes down the street to where our animals are tied, and if you asks me I'd say that we went out of town fast. In fact we showed so much animation that Bill McFee, our progressive sheriff, took a shot at us, just on general principles.

We strung off up the road, me and Telescope fighting for first place with Chuck running a close second and Muley bringing up the rear, eating alkali dust like a machine.

We hammers along for about two miles, when all to once we sees a cloud of dust ahead of us. Said cloud is sliding toward the grade down to the Wind River crossing, and we all sighs to think what that runaway team will do to that lady when they hit the boulders of Wind River. We shoves on more steam and unhooks our ropes. Me and Telescope ain't got room for two loops the way we're running; so I slips back into second place.

Down that grade we sails and into the willows just short of the ford. Chuck and Muley have picked up a little, which hampers our show to do any fancy rope stunts, and them four animals runs almost a dead heat to where the road breaks straight down to the river. Which only gives us a pitch of about thirty feet to the water's edge.

I don't just know what happened then. We're going too fast to even take a second look. I seen a buckboard, with the horses standing up in the water, and then the next thing I know I'm spinning over and over in the air. Above me is Muley, with his legs spread out like sails, and he's flopping his arms like he was trying to fly higher. I remember that I laughed at Muley trying to imitate a bird, and just then I took my first bath short of Saturday evening.

I landed in the river flat on my stummick and found out that a feller don't have to learn to swim in order to do it. All the wind is out of my carcass, but I sure done some fancy crawling until I lands on a sandbar down the river and pumps some more wind into my system. In my pocket is a bottle of "Track Annihilator," and I immediate and soon finds the need of a stimulant. I hauls it out, removes the stopper and squints through it at the sun.

"Blam!" That bottle fades out of my hand, and all I've got left is the cork.

The next bullet cuts a rosette off my chaps; so I slides into the water like an alligator and proceeds to waller off downstream. I may die from drowning—I say may, 'cause I'm taking a chance—but it's a cinch that if I stay on that sand-bar any longer that *hombre* with the rifle is going to improve with practise, which will spoil all of Henry Peck's future ambitions.

I hears a few more shots before I grabs a willer and hauls myself out into the high grass. I'm too tired to hunt for information; so I rusticates there until I hears somebody tramping grass and grunting:

"Gol dang 'em! Gol dang 'em! Hope I drownded the whole mess of pups. Hope I leaded up all that didn't drown. Half-witted horse-wranglers. No brains! Race right into me and my load of dynamite. Too bad it didn't bust and blow 'em all to ——! Team runs away and leaves me on the wrong side. Gol dang——"

"Wick Smith, throw up your hands," says I sweet-like.

He drops his gun and grabs atmosphere.

"Toss that rifle into the brush," says I, and he reaches down like a nice little feller and obeys.

I takes it and throws it further into the woods, and then I walks out to him.

"Hello, Wick," says I. "How's things in Piperock?"

"Tolable, Hen. How's the Cross J these nice days? Where's your gun?"

"Lost it in the river," says I.

WE LOOKS at each other for a while, and then he says—

"What was your hurry a while ago, Hen?"

"Runaway. Strange lady comes in on the train, and we're going to take her to—I wonder where we was going to take her, Wick?"

"My gosh, didn't you have no place picked out?"

"Maybe Telescope did. Well, she got in the buckboard, and the team runs away, and we thought you was it, and—well, what's the matter with you?"

"Strange lady came in on the train?" he gasps. "What did she look like?"

"Morn in Spring," says I. "She had hair and eyes and a mouth and——"

"Great lovely dove!" he whoops. "That's her to a flea's flicker."

"Who?"

"My wife's sister, Amelia. My ——! She ain't due yet."

"Came today," says I. "Came today, and——"

"Went away," says a sad voice, and there stands Muley, Telescope and Chuck.

They sure are something for to see. They look like they had been made of mud and hadn't dried out yet.

"It was fate," says Muley, digging the ooze out of his eye.

"She braved the dangers of the iron trail,
Maybe she rode on boats that have a sail,
And all was well,
Until she came to peaceful Paradise,
Where everybody leaves who has the price.
Fate sure is ——!!"

"Amen," says Telescope. "You handled that well, Muley."

"Gents," says I, "don't be sacrilegious. You are now standing in the presence of the bereaved brother-in-law. The lost lady was his wife's sister."

"Shucks!" exclaims Telescope, trying to remove the hat he ain't got.

"This is painful, Wick. Where's your outfit?"

"Holy henhawks!" wails Wick. "You fellers bucked over it and through it, et cettery, and left me setting on the bank on a busted box of dynamite, with nothing left but my rifle—and Hen threw that in the jungle. The rest, if there's anything left, is likely on its way to Piperock."

"And we're on foot," wails Chuck. "My tobacco is wet, and there ain't a drink in the crowd, and——"

"And Shakespeare's dead, and Longfellow's dead, and I don't feel very good myself," finishes Muley.

"And we've got to find that runaway," says I. "They're likely at the ranch—unless they're strung out along the road."

"My wife will give me particular thunder," wails Wick. "She ain't expecting me to bring back no deceased sister-in-law—darn it all! I reckon we better toddle over to the ranch, eh?"

"I know a short-cut," offers Chuck. "We'll walk back over that ridge and swing on to the road on the other side of Ghost Gulch. That's only about four miles."

"And still four miles from the ranch," groans Muley. "And us wearing high-heeled boots."

"Ye gods, I wish I had that rifle," grunts Wick. "I'd kill four punchers right here."

"Death ain't nothing," groans Muley, limping along.

"Hell hath no fury like a blistered heel,
That busts and then begins to peel."

It's dark when we got to the Cross J ranch, and we limps in like five lost souls. There ain't a trace of that buckboard or the lady. There ain't nobody around the place.

"My gosh!" wails Wick. "Something has got to be did. She was my wife's sister."

"Why use the past tense?" complains Muley. "Maybe she still is your wife's sister. We'll be square with her, Wick, and consider her alive until she disappoints us."

"I know where the old man keeps his spirits," states Chuck, fussing with a window. "You fellers feel spirit voices calling?"

We did. Chuck found the cache, and we has quite a seance.

"Walking is too slow," complains Wick. "I've got to go faster than that, boys. Ain't there a danged thing around here I can ride upon?

"Ain't you *hombres* got enough *sabe* in your system to know that out there somewhere in the stilly night is a remnant of my wife's family, crying for succor?"

"Might he not ride Solomon?" asks Chuck, wiggling his ears at Muley.

"Beyond question he may," nods Muley. "Hang a hull on Solomon, Chuck, and let the sucker arrive at his wife's sister's side without delay."

"Solomon is which?" asks Wick.

"Solomon," says Telescope, "is a mule. A white mule—in color. He ain't no speed-demon, but he sure can save shoe leather, Wick."

"I accepts the nomination," says Wick and takes another drink.

Chuck comes back in about ten minutes, leading that long, hungry-looking mule. We helps Wick into the saddle, wishes him a pleasant journey, and then Chuck hits Solomon across the rump with a strap. Solomon bucks stiff-legged down to the gate, and then we hear him pounding off down the hard road.

Chuck stands there looking at what he's got in his hand, and then:

"Gee gosh! When I took the rope off that mule, I took the bridle, too. Poor Wickie ain't got no rudder for his old white ship."

"Cancel any help from Smiths," says Telescope. "Solomon, with all his wives, never was half as crazy as that namesake of his. Let us all have another inoculation of paralysis microbes and start out being merciful. We've got to find that lady."

Then four fools started out in the dark. We sang a song at the gate and then piked off down the road, arm in arm. As usual Muley gets so sentimental that he has to compose a little; so we has to stop while he recites:

"An angel came to cow-land and stole my heart away.
She was a shrinking flower that came to me today.
My heart is like a sinker, 'cause I love her well,
But I'm ——"

Muley breaks down and begins to sob: "I can't finish it! My rimer gets drownded in tears."

"Let me assist you," begs Chuck. "How's thish?

"My heart is like a shinker, 'cause I love her well,
But I'm 'fraid thish lovely angel has got busted all
to ——!

"Ain't that shome finish?"

"Grewshome ghoul," shudders Telescope.

"It's a fac'," argues Chuck. "Bet anybody forty dollars she never made the turn out of Sillman Gulch. Betcha she turned over there. Ain't nobody got any shporting blood? Even money that she didn't make that turn—thirty to forty that they hung up before they got that far. Any takers? Bet ten 'gainst forty that—that Solomon has killed Wick Smith before thish."

"Now you're getting into pleasant conversation," says Telescope. "That's what I call looking at the doughnut instead of the hole."

I don't know where we went. We took turns carrying that demijohn. We wanted something to pour between unresisting lips, like you read about, but we can't seem to find no unresisting lips.

I know we all fell into Wind River, which is three miles from Paradise. Muley hung up on a sand-bar and sobbed himself to sleep. Telescope crawled back on the bank and implored us to go ahead and save the women and children and leave him to die like a man. I heard Chuck singing—

"Locked in a stable with a s-h-e-e-p,
I lay me dow-w-w-wn in hay to sle-e-e-e-ep."

Me, I got tangled up in the limbs of a fallen tree and went to sleep with my feet over a limb.

* * *

"WELL!" says a voice, and I woke up. There is "Ricky" Henderson setting on his bronc, looking at us. "What's the matter with you fellers? I helped rope your broncs yesterday when they came back to town, and they're tied to the rack in front of the Eureka—or were last night."

"The matter with us?" asks Muley mean-like. "That's our business, Ricky. Who told you to tie up our broncs in Paradise? Next time you leave 'em alone and let 'em come home. *Sabe?*"

"Yeah?" snorts Ricky, riding away. "With their tails behind them, eh? All right, *Little Bo-Peep*."

"*Bo-Peep*, eh?" whispers Chuck, wiggling his ears. "Mamma mine!"

"Our broncs are in Paradise," mentions Telescope. "Three miles more, comrades."

We hobbles along on sore feet for a while, and then Chuck says—

"Say, Telescope, where was you aiming to take the lady? And what was your big scheme?"

"Out to the ranch, Chuck. I figured on dressing her up in our clothes and hiring her out as a male teacher. *Sabe?* Figured we'd slip one over on them three old pelicans, and then they'd have to keep her—or never hear the last of it. It was a good idea. If that little runt of a Warner had sense enough to leave the team tied," adds Telescope a little later.

"You didn't need to throw your hat on the ground and whoop like a drunken Indian," reproves Muley. "You're to blame, Telescope."

"Yes," says I. "You and Telescope has to argue like a pair of fools."

"Oh, you wasn't in the argument, was you?" sneers Telescope. "You three grocery-store punchers make me tired."

"You cut out that runt talk," says Chuck. "I'd rather be small and shapely than to be so tall that the buzzards roost in my hair. You think you're a lady-killer, Telescope, and this is the one time when you likely qualify. Maybe the jury will adjudge so."

"Yes, and he swore aloud before her," says I. "He talked around her like she was his wife."

"She smiled at me," grins Chuck sweet-like, and Muley snorts:

"Smiled! Laughed, Chuck. Do you think for a minute that a person like her would smile at critters like you three. That woman's got a soul."

"Where do you qualify with soulful women, Muley?" asks Telescope. "Since when has the fair sex designated a hunk of lard as the target for soulful glances? Of course, if you designated a runt like Chuck or a squint-faced *hombre* like Hen Peck——"

Love has cut a breach in the Four Disgraces. Cupid has poisoned his arrows, and we forgets friendship ties. Maybe it was an accident—maybe not, but anyway we ain't gone far when Muley steps on Chuck's ankle. Chuck yowls like a tom-cat and slaps Muley right in the face. Telescope grabs Chuck by the neck, and I kicks Telescope's feet out from under him.

That took team work, if anybody asks you. I reckon the buzzards were the only ones who enjoyed it. Somebody hit me between the eyes, and I up-ended in a mesquite bush, where I found a snag, about two feet long and as big as my wrist. So I waded right back into the conflict. Then somebody handed me an encore in the same spot, and I got used as a welcome mat. Then somebody laid down on top of me and pushed me into the dirt, but I got out, found an unoccupied boot and hit that somebody several times over the head. My eyes don't permit me to judge distance, but I felt out my target and made no misses.

Then I laid down, too, and went to sleep.

After a while I woke up and sat there, looking around. I can see Telescope's legs sticking up over the top of a mesquite, and Chuck is setting in the shade of the same bush, crooning to himself while he tries to light a cigaret on the sole of his boot. Muley is beside me, snoring sweetly, and setting there beside us on a dilapidated white mule is Wick Smith.

Wick sure looks like he had been someplace and met something awful. The mule's head is hanging down weary-like, while Wick slouches in the saddle, with his jaw hanging down about three inches.

He weaves in the saddle and his mustache acts nervous-like.

"Find anything?" he asks like the weak croak of a frog.

"Not yet," I whispers back at him.

He nods, slaps the mule side of its head and turns into the road.

"I'm still looking," he whispers, and I says:

"That's fine. So am I, but I can't see nothing, Wick."

And, when I laid down beside Muley, I saw Wick and Solomon fade off up the road toward Paradise. After a while we all got up and sort of stood around. Chuck yawned and looked at his watch-chain. Pretty soon Telescope cleared his throat—

"I'm—I'm all through—with all of you—the whole danged bunch!" says he hesitating-like and starts limping toward town.

"Me—me, too," says Muley and follers Telescope.

Chuck looks at me mean-like and says—

"Me too."

He pilgrims after Muley.

Then the whole danged bunch limped in behind Chuck.

I passed Chuck in a few minutes, and then I made Muley eat my dust. Telescope has contracted a limp, which causes him to weave across the road a lot and makes it hard for me to pass him. But I made it. Nobody said anything to me, and, when folks don't speak to me as I go past, I get snobby, too.

I hobbles into Mike Pelly's saloon and sets down. There ain't nobody there except the bartender. Pretty soon Telescope weaves in and sets down in the other corner. Chuck points straight for the pool-table, and then Muley stumbles in. He looks to have lost twenty pounds, and his feet have swelled until he's had to slit his boots.

"You fellers quitting the Cross J?" asks the bartender. "Thought maybe you was," he continues when we don't answer, "'cause I seen your boss leading four horses behind the wagon when he left last night."

"Last night?" asks Muley. "Wagon?"

"Uh-huh. Borrowed Mike's team and wagon."

I rolled a smoke, and the match made as much noise as a six-shooter. We never thought to look in the corral last night.

Then Wick Smith comes in. He buys himself a drink, and then he wipes his mustache. He looks at us sad-like and shakes his head.

"Been to the post-office," says he. "She ain't coming until this afternoon."

"——!" grunts Telescope. "That team must 'a' taken her a long ways."

"Didn't have nun-nothing on that—that mum-mule," grunts Wick, and then he weaves out of the door.

Wick has been drinking.

"What seems to be the trouble with you fellers?" asked the bartender. "You look like you'd been to battle and got run over by a cannon."

We ignores the inquiry, and pretty soon Telescope says—

"Been anything startling going on here lately?"

"——!" snorts the bartender. "Startling! Nothing ever happens in Paradise." And he goes on wiping glasses.

"That's good," says Muley soft-like. "I love a quiet village."

We got up, one at a time, and wandered outside. I'm the last one out. There ain't nothing to do but walk back. We might chip in and hire a rig at the livery stable, but under the circumstances—well, we don't feel like riding so close together, and rigs cost money.

I seen Muley setting on the sidewalk, pulling off his boots, and over on the watering-trough, one on each end, sets Telescope and Chuck like a couple of snow-birds, soaking their sore feet. Muley joins them, and then Henry Peck goes over and immerses his corns. We ain't been there long when here comes Doughgod Smith, galloping up the street.

"If he's got any more dirty work to have done, he can do it himself," proclaims Chuck. "I'm through deceiving women."

Doughgod races up to us and hops up and down around us.

"Get down to the depot, Chuck!" he yelps. "She's there."

"Who?" asks Chuck.

"The lady—dog-gone you! The one I gave you the money for. *Sabe?* Point her homeward, boys, and make it sudden," and Doughgod lopes on up the street.

He sure is skittish around calico.

"We've got to stand together," observes Chuck, pulling on his boots.

"We've got to. Divided we fall."

"Under them circumstances I waves a flag of truce," says Telescope. "I may kill a friend later on, but it never can be said that a Tolliver ever went back on a friend in need."

WE ALL plods down the street, with Muley carrying his boots, and, just as we got to the depot, a freight-train whistles. The lady is there. She's setting there on a low truck in the shade, doing fancy work, and she's the same lady.

"My ——!" snorts Telescope. "She must be made of cast-iron. Ain't bunged up a bit."

"And I ain't only got seven dollars of that money left," wails Chuck. "I must 'a' lost it."

We all digs down and manages to collect enough to make up the original twenty, and, just as the freight rolls in, we walks over to the lady. Chuck leans over and drops the money in her lap, and her face turns white as flour when she looks up at us.

"Get right into the caboose," orders Chuck. "Dog-gone it, ma'am, we're sorry as ——, but we ain't got no time to argue. There's the money, and here's your train. Get on like a nice little girl, and you can write to Doughgod for further information. *Sabe?*"

I sure felt sorry for her. She sort of gasps and slides off that truck, but I reckon our looks were enough. She allows herself to walk right into the train, and away she goes off up the track toward Silver Bend.

Doughgod has sneaked up and saw the whole thing, and he sure is glad. We all sets down on the platform, and all to once we feels that it has been a year since we had anything to eat. Doughgod offers to take us to a restaurant, but we ain't presentable; so he offers to bring us a ton of crackers and cheese and sardines. We accepts and cheers Doughgod as he hurries up-town. There's another train due in an hour; so we sets down there in the shade to eat. We seen the depot-agent looking at us through the window. He's a new man there; so we don't blame him for looking with suspicion upon us. We sure filled our skin with food, and then the train comes rambling in.

The usual bunch of folks hops off to stretch their legs, and all to once we hears a voice behind us—

"Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Smith?"

We all turns, and there stands a tall, skinny female, with a nose like the beak of a hawk and a lot of mustard-colored hair. I glances around and saw Doughgod galloping off up the street like a scared coyote.

"Ma'am," says Telescope, "I can't say. He may stop in Paradise, but I'd favor Canada."

"Say!" yelps a heavy voice behind us, and we all turns. It is the new station agent, and in his hands is one of them sawed-off shotguns which are furnished by express companies, and he's got it cocked. "I want to know," says he, "if you are the four whelps who kidnaped my wife and put her in that rig yesterday. The team ran away, turned the corner and ran into a fence, and that's all that saved her life. I'm asking a question?"

"Yesterday?" asks Telescope foolish-like. "Yesterday?"

"I said it!" he yelps. "And an hour or so ago the same four whelps forced her to climb on a freight-train. She just wired me from Silver Bend. I'm still asking questions, gents."

I seen that skinny lady edging away from us, and I seen her hop on to the last step as the train starts, and she ducks inside like a rabbit.

"Wait!" says Telescope. "You got that right? The team ran around the corner and into a fence and stopped. Is that right?"

"Ke-rect!" he snaps. "I've sworn out John Doe warrants for the men who did it, and the sheriff is investigating right now. All I want is to find 'em and I'll fill 'em so full of ——"

Blam!

Telescope hooked one of his feet behind that feller's legs, and yanked so quick and hard that the station agent got an upside-down view of his own place of business.

Man, we moved. A buckshot cut a groove in my boot heel, and Muley got one across his hip pocket before we got out of range, which was fast work with a gun.

We dusts straight for town, when we almost runs over Wick Smith. He's coming along, taking up most of the road, and me and him both tries to turn the same way. I picked myself up as quick as possible, and started on, when I heard Wick say—

"Train in yet?"

"Not yet," I yells back and tries to catch up with the rest of my bunch, who seem to have met somebody and then went on.

That somebody was Doughgod. I finds him setting in the middle of the road with the brim of his hat down around his neck and a fool look on his face. As I come up, he holds up the letter he's hanging on to and he says to me:

"Huh-Henry, she ain't—ain't coming here. She's gug-got a bub-better job. She ain't coming here, Henry."

"She shows a lot of sense," says I, and I lopes on.

I seen Telescope and Chuck and Muley gallop off the street and cut across the hills; so I puts on more speed and catches them.

"Bill McFee is up there," pants Telescope when we slows to a walk. "Dud-don't forget we're four John Does."

"That ain't nothing to the word I'd use," groans Muley.

Well, we eventually got home. We collapses on the steps of the bunk-house, and I don't care if I never move again. Pretty soon Telescope glances up at the door and grunts.

Half-way up the door a piece of white paper has been pasted; so we creaks to a standing position and peruses same:

> I put your horses in the livery-stable last night, and, if you don't want a big bill against them, you better get them right away.
>
> (signed) J. B. W.

"——!" snorts Muley. "He—he just led them down to the stable, and that fool-bartender thought he was taking them home."

"And we been walking away from them all this time," groans Chuck.

"Here comes Mike Pelly and the old man now," says Telescope.

We watches old J. B. Whittaker and Mike Pelly walking down from the ranch-house, talking serious-like. The old man turns at the barn, but Mike comes on down to us.

"Howdy," says Mike. "How's everything, boys?"

"Ain't able to kick," says Telescope. "How's it with you?"

"Tolable. See Doughgod in town?"

"He was there the last we seen of him," admits Muley. "Why?"

"Going down to see him. Dang this trustee business, anyway. Nothing but trouble. Me and the old man have decided to accept that teacher that wrote to Doughgod, even if she is a female. Never mix into the school-teacher business, boys. She's ——!"

"She is," agrees Muley, and we all nods.

By Charles Beadle
A Four-part Story
Conclusion

WITCH-DOCTORS

Author of "The Winged Avenger," "The Black Lure," etc.

XXII

UPON the site of Birnier's old camp in the forest was a high palisade, built from tree to tree. Inside of the gate, beside a small, conical hut, burned the sacred fires, tended by Mungongo; before a green canvas tent stood the new idol, which differed from the original in having a better perspective and proportion of features and body, yet lacked the master touch of expression subconsciously given by the fingers of the native artist.

Against the wall were stacked uniform cases to make a table, upon which was a hand mirror and toilet gear; above, a photograph of Lucille was pinned upon the canvas. Upon the camp-bed, screened by a mosquito net, lay the new king-god, Moon-Spirit, the magic book in his hands. As he read, he smiled:

> Kings, princes, monarchs and magistrates seem to be most happy. But look into their estate, you shall find them to be most cumbered with cares, in perpetual fear, agony, suspicion, jealousy. As he (Valer. 1. 7. c. 3) saith of a crown, if they but knew the discontents that accompany it, they would not stoop to pick it up. *Quem mihi regem dabis* (saith Chrysostom) *non curis plenum?*

The incarnation of the Unmentionable One smiled, put down the book and glanced across at the photograph.

"And yet they still talk of the advantages of a monarchy!" he commented.

The original plan concocted with Marufa and Zalu Zako in the forest when making the new idol was that Birnier would become chief witch-doctor and Zalu Zako would be appointed king-god with Marufa as the power behind the throne. Although Zalu Zako desired to escape the yoke, his protest was enfeebled by the sense of fatality. It had been utterly squashed by the promise of Marufa, at Birnier's suggestion, that the marriage tabu would be lifted from the godhead.

But the negligence of Marufa in allowing the white man to carry the idol, arranged with the idea of investing Moon-Spirit with greater prestige according to the prophecies already announced by Tarum, had permitted Bakahenzie to make his *coup d'état*, thrust the godhead upon the white and to recover his own position.

Birnier, in truth, had little option of refusal as well as little time for reflection upon a situation, the possibility of which had not occurred to him. For Marufa was completely outmaneuvered by his rival, and the certainty of escape from his doom offered by Bakahenzie revived the image of Bakuma in Zalu Zako and bought his partisanship instantly.

With Napoleonic swiftness to grasp the advantages gained, Bakahenzie drove the lay chiefs from the sacred presence, which he surrounded by a bodyguard of the awed brethren, expelled the household from Zalu Zako's compound and hustled into holy isolation the incarnation bearing the new god.

Bewildered by the rapidity of the moves, Marufa and Zalu Zako were separated from Moon-Spirit. Then, in the general confusion, not knowing exactly what was happening, Birnier complied with what he believed to be the regulations regarding gods. But, when he perceived that he was about to be left alone, he clutched Mungongo and refused to part with him.

Bakahenzie, compelled to avoid any delay before consolidating his position, instantly shut up Mungongo in the same web by declaring him the Keeper of the Sacred Fires and so disposed of any agent outside the tabu or craft. As soon as this was accomplished and a dance to celebrate the lighting of the new fires commanded, the wily chief witch-doctor approached Marufa, who, realizing that he was hopelessly outwitted, was only too eager to make the best terms possible.

Birnier, of course, had known that the king-god was never allowed to be seen by the populace except at the Harvest Festival. Yet he accepted his isolation philosophically, lured by the expectation of the secrets he was about to learn, although his curiosity led sometimes to the vision of a god peeping through a fence.

While the drums summoning the council of chiefs and wizards were muttering through the moist air, to Birnier, squatting on the floor of Zalu Zako's hut with Mungongo beside him, came Bakahenzie to instruct him in his rôle. To whet his curiosity still more, he learned that from the moment of appearance in the gate of the sacred enclosure for the ceremony of the lighting of the royal fires every movement of body and speech was regulated as rigidly as the etiquette of the court of Spain.

At a certain signal of the chief witch-doctor was the king-god to leave the hut and appear from behind the idol; with arms in a certain position was he to approach and squat at an exact spot. To Mungongo was given the two fire-sticks, newly consecrated, and instructions as detailed.

As the chief witch-doctor retired, the chanting began. Interested to know what was about to happen, Birnier obeyed in the spirit of a game. So in the great darkness squatted these two, listening to the chanting, cries and groans to the accompaniment of the drums and lyres and the perpetual twitter of the forest. At last came a violent screech from Bakahenzie, which Mungongo declared was their cue.

Around the circle of the fence, to avoid the eyes of the audience, ran Mungongo to the temporary Place of Fires. Feeling as if he were once more playing in an amateur dramatic club, Birnier stalked with portentous dignity from the hut past the idol and took his seat upon the enchanted place. Without the palisade and within another squatted in correct order the lines of wizards and chiefs, Zalu Zako retaining, rather by prestige of his former holiness and indecision as to what his status really was, his position at their head.

Upon his haunches before a large calabash upon a fire, Bakahenzie finished the mumbling of incantations over the sacred ingredients and, leaping to his feet, began a wild, gyrating dance to the throb of the drums and the pneumonic chorus of the assembled cult. Swifter and swifter flew the chief witch-doctor. The glow of the fire tinted his whirling bronze body with flecks of green and red as he gyrated in and out the shadows.

Suddenly he threw a handful of herbs upon the fire, which was immediately enveloped in a cloud of smoke into which, with a terrific screech, Bakahenzie disappeared. The drums and grunting ceased.

Then in the swirling column of blue reappeared his figure, holding something in his hands. To the wild outburst of drums and groans he sprang toward the king-god elect and anointed his bare breast and shoulders with a pungent compound. Again he leaped away into another dance, while Mungongo furiously plied the two fire-sticks. When the spark was blown upon the dry tinder and the first flame flickered, Bakahenzie dropped flat before the gate. From the wizards went up the great shout—

"The fire is lighted!"

And, from the mass of warriors and folk confined to their huts behind the outer palisade, the phrase was echoed in a mighty wail, startling monkeys and parrots into as wild an acclamation of the new king-god.

BAKAHENZIE, rising to his haunches, began a chant in honor of the new king, a chant based upon the song composed by Marufa and repeated on the phonograph, but developing even stranger merits and attributes.

Until the first glimmer of dawn through the forest roof squatted Birnier as motionless as etiquette demanded, listening to the strange psalm of praise with avid interest and observation.

Suddenly, amid a furious clamor of the drums, Bakahenzie, Marufa and one other of the inner cult of the five who had not deserted led the body of the doctors in a rush into the sacred enclosure, seized upon the startled king and hustled him to the base of the idol, where, yielding to the whispered instructions of Marufa, he took the idol once more upon his shoulders. Guided by Bakahenzie, he walked out of the gate and through the village to the yelling and screaming of the wizards, some of whom, according to precedent, ran about—rattling hut doors, pulling thatches and howling ferociously in search of any sacrilegious peeper.

As he tramped on with his load, Marufa yelled in his ear that he must carry the Burden of the World no matter what happened to him, for, if he let the idol fall, then would he be killed upon the spot to save the sky from falling, too. Wondering what this meant and where he was going, the cut of thongs upon his legs surprized him into a halt. Immediately a terrific cry went up:

"The Bearer of the World stumbles! *Aie! Aieeeeeeeeeee!*"

Despite the more furious flogging, the intellectual interest in this strange conception distracted his mind from the pain of the blows; also, his bare back was protected by the idol, and his leggings and trousers deadened the lashes. For a moment more he hesitated.

But he was unarmed and had voluntarily taken on the adventure; so he would see it through. As he broke into a shuffling run, for the idol fortunately was lighter than the previous one and he was a more powerful man than Kawa Kendi, another howl of joy and relief echoed throughout the village.

So along the old forest trail he traveled as fast as he could, assisted slightly by wizards' hands as he crawled over clumps of undergrowth. The intensity of the whipping had decreased as soon as they were out of the village, but, throughout, an occasional vicious whack testified to the presence of some serious-minded doctor.

Thus it was that the white king-god came to his throne and sat in state upon his bed, to smile at the reflections of a melancholic philosopher.

So far so good, reflected Birnier, although the enforced isolation and strict curtailment of his actions had already begun to be irksome; yet, to attain so difficult a goal, sacrifice must be borne, he argued philosophically.

The royal larder, he noticed with thankfulness, was kept well-stocked, for every day appeared a slave who left just within the entrance, chickens, bananas, milk and fresh water—and sometimes a young goat. All such provisions which he had happened to take into the forest with him and so had escaped M'Yalu's marauding hands, had been placed in his tent with other cases as containing no man knew what mighty magic.

For three days he had been left utterly alone. Sounds of drums and chanting from the distant village had reached them on the still air, but what they were doing he could not discover. No layman was allowed to come near the sacred enclosure.

While he strolled, taking a smoke and constitutional, around and around his "pen," as he put it, several of the lesser wizards appeared and stood at a distance from the gate to stare at him. When addressed they made no reply. On the second occasion he began to be irritated, but he kept his temper and went to cover in his tent, muttering—

"Why the devil don't they bring me some buns?"

On the fourth day patience began to fray. He could not understand why neither Zalu Zako nor Marufa visited him. He had no notion of knowing how long this quarantine was going to last. He was on the point of going to find out, but Mungongo pleaded that they would both instantly be killed if he did. So Birnier retired to the tent to seek consolation from a record of Lucille's voice.

Birnier attempted to cross-examine Mungongo to find out what was the object of this isolation, but beyond the fact that strangers were never permitted to behold the king-god, even lay natives, without special magic—which was only made once a year at the Harvest Festival—lest evil be made upon his person and so endanger the world, Mungongo did not know; merely that so it was.

What power over the head witch-doctor the king really had, Mungongo had no notion. The king-god was the most powerful magician known, asserted Mungongo. Did he not make rain and bear the world upon his shoulders? When Birnier unwisely denied this feat, Mungongo looked pained and began a remark, but he balked before the name Moon-Spirit to ask the name of Birnier's father.

At the image conjured of a handsome white-haired planter and ex-owner of many slaves, Brinier smiled, but he knew the tabu regarding the ban upon the names of the dead and that he, presumably having ascended into the divine plane, was therefore classed with the departed. He recollected that the old man, who belonged to a cadet branch of a royalist family, had been called *"le Marquis,"* of which he was excessively proud. Birnier translated into the dialect the nearest possible rendition of the title—"The Lord-of-many-lands."

"The Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands," continued Mungongo, satisfied, "doth but tickle the feet of his slave."

On the fifth afternoon, while the god was engrossed in a cure for love madness which might be of service to zu Pfeiffer, came a voice without, crying:

"The son of Maliko would speak with the Bearer of the World!"

Birnier glanced across at the photograph of Lucille.

"Some job I've gotten!" he remarked as he rose.

In the gate sat Bakahenzie. Birnier was conscious of an idiotic impulse to rush forward to greet him as an old and long-lost friend. But, remembering the dignity of his godhood, he remained in the tent doorway, bidding the chief witch-doctor to advance.

BIRNIER retired backward and sat beneath the net, for the mosquitoes were thick as they are on the Bayou Barataria. Mungongo, possibly to prove his erudition, sat upon one of the cases containing much magic, at which Bakahenzie from the floor in the doorway looked askance. Birnier was keenly anxious to know what was happening regarding Zalu Zako, Marufa and the fortunes of the tribe, hoping that with the restoration of the Unmentionable One they would return to their allegiance.

According to etiquette he remained silent, waiting for Bakahenzie to open the conversation, until, realizing that he was a god and that the chief witch-doctor was doing the same thing, he reflected swiftly and, desiring to make an impression, repeated Bakahenzie's mystic phrase which he had overheard whilst hiding in the jungle previous to the dénouement—

"That which is and must be shall be!"

Bakahenzie grunted his acknowledgment of the profundity of the statement.

"He who would trap the leopard must needs dig the pit."

Another uncompromising silence urged Birnier to force the pace a little.

"O son of Maliko, what say the omens and the signs of the evil one, Eyes-in-the-hands?"

"When shall the Unmentionable One return unto the Place of Kings?" demanded Bakahenzie.

"The Holy One returneth not unto the place appointed until that which defileth is removed," retorted Birnier.

Bakahenzie took snuff and appeared to consider. Then he glanced around the tent as if in search of something.

"When will the voice of Tarum speak through the pod of the soul?"

Mungongo looked expectant and stood up. But Birnier ignored him.

"The fruit doth not fall until it be ripe. He would know what hath been done by his slaves for the baiting of the pit for the unclean one?"

"Would the magician that cometh from the sea make pretense that an elephant is a mouse?" inquired Bakahenzie.

For a moment Birnier was perplexed; then he realized that the chief witch-doctor implied that he, as king-god, did but mock his priest by pretending that he did not know all things.

"Doth the chief witch-doctor make magic for the curing of the scratch of a girl of the hut thatch?" he retorted. "Lest thy heart wither like unto a fallen leaf, know then that the soul of Tarum hath made words for the return of the Unmentionable One to the Place of Kings, but, that his children may not be as the dogs of the village who are driven, he wills that you prepare the pit for the trapping of the defiled one." Bakahenzie's eyes stolidly regarded the tent wall. "O son of Maliko, hast thou sent forth the sound of the drum throughout the land that the children may know of the coming?"

"When will the voice of Tarum speak through the pod of the soul?" demanded Bakahenzie insistently.

Birnier sat motionless in the native manner. Irritated by this childish tenacity to apparently a fixed idea, he yielded to an impulse which was almost a weakness.

"O son of Maliko," said he, "thou art a mighty magician!"

Bakahenzie grunted modest assent.

"Even as I am."

Another grunt.

"Give unto me thine ears and thine eyes that I may reveal unto thee that which is known to the mightiest of magicians."

Commanding the delighted Mungongo to bring out the phonograph, he continued:

"Thou hast heard of the mighty doings of the unclean devourer of men, Eyes-in-the-hands. I have magic the like of which man hath never seen. Is it not so?"

"Ough!"

"Yet will Moon-Spirit, the Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands, make thee to see that which is, is not!"

"That which is, is not," repeated Bakahenzie, whose professional mind was pleased with the phrase.

In the desire to explain rationally the mystery of a phonograph and despairing of any attempt to describe the laws of vibration, of sound and color, Birnier sought for a likely simile. Encouraged by the almost imperceptible fact that he had awakened Bakahenzie's visible interest, he plunged on:

"Within this piece of tree is there nought but many pieces of iron such as thy spears are made of. Thou knowest that there are places by the river and in the rocks where a man may speak and that his words will be returned to him. Is it not so?"

"They are white words, O Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands!" returned Bakahenzie. "For the spirit of the river and the rocks mocks the voices of those who have not eaten of the Sacred Banana (the uninitiated)."

"But he mocks thy voice as well," protested Birnier.

"Are there not goats in ghostland who bleat at the wizard and the peasant?"

"By the lord!" murmured Birnier, although the mask of his face did not change. "Ghostland is full of goats if one were to credit some of the most modern witch-doctors! Still, demonstration——"

"Thou seest, fellow magician," he continued, "the pod of the soul of mighty Tarum, his ear like unto an elephant, his color like unto a lion!"

Birnier got out of the mosquito net and knelt beside the phonograph in front of Bakahenzie. Taking off the trumpet and cylinder-carrier, he opened up the inside, revealing the clock-work motor, wound it up, stopped it and released it.

"Thine eyes see that my words are white. These things are but as pieces of metal of thy spears. Is it not so?"

"Ough!"

Birnier closed up the machine, adjusted the trumpet and put on the cylinder of Marufa's record.

"*Aie! Aiee!* I am the spirit of Kintu!
Aie! Aiee! I am he who first was!"

Birnier, noticing that the desired astonishment was registered by an almost impalpable start, stopped the machine and changed the record.

"Rejoice, O my children, for he that is bidden shall come!
Rejoice, O ye warriors, for he that shall lead thee shall come!
Rejoice, O ye wizards, for he that is greater than ye shall come!
Rejoice, O ye women, for he that fertilizes shall come!"

Birnier allowed the machine to run through the chant until the end:

"He shall come forth bearing that which ye seek!
Hear me, my people, and give voice to thy word!"

The machine whirred and stopped, Birnier turned to Bakahenzie.

"Thou hast seen, O my brother magician, that my words are white?"

"Ough!" assented Bakahenzie.

"Thou hast seen, O my brother magician, that at the will of my finger upon that which is made but of spear-heads that the voice of Tarum hath spoken, the voice which is but the mocking voice of Marufa amid the rocks or the river?"

"Ough!"

"Dost thou not know that he who knows the ways of rocks, who can make pieces of spear into that which will say and do that which he wills, is a greater magician than he who must needs go unto the rocks to be mocked?"

"Thou art the greatest of magicians, O Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands," responded Bakahenzie in a burst of eloquence. "For thou hast entrapped the spirits of rocks and spears to do thy bidding."

"Oh, ——!" sighed the professor. "What is the use of language?"

XXIII

A FAVORITE panacea for a stupid action is the sentiment of martyrdom. When M'Yalu persisted in bitter reproaches to Yabolo and Sakamata, the first retorted that the punishment was the result of having committed the sacrilege of abducting the sacred Bride of the Banana.

Then did M'Yalu consider that not only had he been trapped by one of his own people whom he had deserted, but, to add insult to injury, he was not understood. Neither Yabolo nor Sakamata—as Bakahenzie—could comprehend a chief and a warrior making such a fuss over a girl. That the confiscation of M'Yalu's property was an insult, they both agreed, but, biased by both fear of Eyes-in-the-hands and their own interests, they were disposed to pretend that, after all, such a small matter as the abduction of a girl could be overlooked when committed by those about such a powerful god and magician, as expediency is so often the father of a dispensation.

Yet in Yabolo if not in Sakamata, whose hatred of the tribal craft was deep in ratio to the degeneracy of his native code, the outrage upon Bakuma as the Bride of the Banana, while an act of dangerous sacrilege when performed by a Wongolo, violated the half-suppressed traditions and kindled a spark of bitter resentment ready to flare up against Eyes-in-the-hands or Sakamata; but being a diplomatist he concealed that anger, even from himself to a certain degree.

Upon M'Yalu's arrival in the guest-house to find that Bakuma had been taken, his passion had nearly led to his instant destruction, for he had desired to run amuck among the grinning *askaris*. Afterward, when the efforts of his friends and the hungry points of bayonets had cooled his ardor, he had wanted to rush straight to Eyes-in-the-hands, who, according to Sakamata, employed as master of ceremony at the daily audiences, would instantly restore Bakuma to him and visit a terrible punishment upon the evil-doer. But the august presence could not be approached so casually; petition must be made in orthodox form, and the royal pleasure awaited humbly.

According to the words of the Son-of-the-earthquake, as zu Pfeiffer was officially designated by his followers, who placed the actual name under the tabu in token of the acceptance of the magic purple, came a guard to take away M'Yalu's first-born as hostage to the village of the sons of chiefs.

Seething with red rage, M'Yalu rose and mutely followed Yabolo to the place appointed for their housing. Then on the following afternoon at the time of audience M'Yalu waited in the broiling heat for three hand's spans of the sun without being summoned to the green temple. And thus it was for three days.

But upon the fourth, when M'Yalu squatted in the general hut in company with Yabolo, Sakamata and other renegade chiefs, smoldering with bitter resentment, came the pulse of a distant drum, the furious tattoo and long pause, tattoo and long pause, which accompanies the mighty shout at the coronation of a new king-god—"the fire is lighted," a message that had throbbed from that point within the forest from village to village to the slopes of the Gamballagalla and to the Wamungo country.

The perceptible effect upon that circle of bronze figures was a scarcely audible grunt, yet nevertheless that message was like unto a live ember dropped in the dry grass of the cattle country.

That morning one of the renegade chiefs had brought in two others to make their allegiance and received as reward for his fidelity a remittance of one third of the tax levy upon his property—a policy adopted by zu Pfeiffer, which was calculated to encourage the recruiting of his followers by establishing a reputation for lavish generosity to those who obeyed him in contrast to his merciless severity to the recalcitrant ones.

An hour later was M'Yalu summoned from the sweating throng squatted before the line of demon keepers through the giant ebon guards to audience with the Son-of-the-earthquake. At the entrance, as bidden, he knelt, for he knew that he would be compelled did he refuse. A white-hot flame was in his heart, but yet the magnificence of the Son-of-the-world-trembler and his satellites, the terrible ghosts of the distant white god with amulets and charms upon his breast, awed and subdued M'Yalu.

Then came the voice of Sakamata, relating that the chief, M'Yalu, son of M'Busa, made complaint to the Son-of-the-earthquake that his slaves, the keepers of the coughing demons, had taken a girl named Bakuma, daughter of Bakala, and that he craved restitution of his property. While this was being translated by the corporal interpreter, M'Yalu watched the magic flame in the mouth of Eyes-in-the-hands, marveling greatly at the smoke which emerged. Then said the interpreter:

"The Son-of-the-lord-of-the-world, the Earthquake, the World-Trembler, who eats up whom he pleases, whose eyes see all things, whose sword slays all things, whose breath is like rain, whose voice is like thunder, whose teeth are the lightning, whose frown is the earthquake, whose smile is the sun, whose ear is the moon, whose eyes are the stars, whose body is the world, saith that when the son of M'Busa (M'Yalu) bringeth three chiefs of the same rank to sit at the august feet, then shall the daughter of Bakala return unto him, but in the meantime shall her girdle remain untied. He hath spoken!"

As he finished, zu Pfeiffer made the signal of dismissal with his jeweled hand, but M'Yalu with the throb of that distant drum in his ears, cried out in protest, saying—

"The words of the Son-of-the-earthquake are like unto spears made of grass!"

The interpreter boggled at the translation of the sentence. Zu Pfeiffer saw a ripple of insubordination. He rapped out an order to have the man taken away and given fifty lashes. Instantly the guards surrounded M'Yalu, who submitted in sudden misgiving, and led him away to receive the punishment.

ZU PFEIFFER gave orders that the girl Bakuma should be found and called the next case, an elderly chief who had had all his property sequestered until he should deliver his eldest son as hostage. He was a slight, withered old man with a white tuft of beard, who came from the southern border, and as soon as zu Pfeiffer's terms had been explained to him he sent a message to his son to flee into the Wamungo country.

In several cases of such rank disobedience zu Pfeiffer had had the culprits shot, and in other cases he had fallen upon the custom of serving two purposes by handing over the victim to the gentle mercies of his *askaris*, which whetted their appetite for cruelty and usually secured the desired revelation of the whereabouts of the hidden ivory or other goods under torture of the burning feet and divers other ingenious methods.

Of late this practise had proved so satisfactory that the mere threat was usually sufficient. This old man had proved obstinate but had, after considerable endurance, screamed his submission. Now he hobbled into zu Pfeiffer's presence with the aid of a stick. Pompously the interpreter recited the list of the titles of the august one and then dwelt upon the wondrous benefits to be obtained at the magic, jeweled hands and demanded that the old chief "eat the dust" and obey the royal mandate.

But the sharp eyes gazed steadily from their wrinkled sockets with a curious gleam in them as he mumbled that "his soul had wandered (he had dreamed) and had met the spirit of Tarum, who had forbidden him to obey the white god."

"The *shenzie* (savage used contemptuously) longs for the fires for his paws, O *Bwana*," translated the interpreter into Kiswahili.

"What does he say?" demanded zu Pfeiffer.

"He says, *Bwana*, that he hath dreamed that his god hath told him that he must not obey you. *Indio*, *Bwana*."

"Tell him that I slew his god as every man knows."

"The Son-of-the-earthquake bids thee to know that he hath eaten up thy god as he eateth up thy warriors when his wrath is aroused. Eat dust that thy beard grow yet longer; stretch not thy tongue and thou shalt be eaten entirely and all that is thine!"

"The fire is lighted," mumbled the old man.

"What does he say?" demanded zu Pfeiffer sharply.

"He attempts to make magic against thee, *Bwana,*" replied the interpreter, who knew not the meaning of the phrase.

"Take away the animal," commanded zu Pfeiffer.

The old man was accordingly led out to the further attentions of the soldiery. But during that afternoon zu Pfeiffer became conscious of a subtle air of defiance, a restlessness and exchanging of glances, so that the demon which Bakunjala had seen so vividly came back to roost somewhere beneath the immaculate uniform.

Neither he nor his sergeants nor their men could speak the Wongolo tongue fluently, so that for interpreter he was compelled to employ one of the corporals. To employ any newly subjected race or tribe as soldiers or in any responsible capacity is unwise, for ties of blood are liable to lead to treachery; yet to trust to the idiosyncrasies and personal values of a native interpreter is equally unwise.

Zu Pfeiffer and his party were as unaware of the meaning of the phrases exchanged as they were of the message in the throbbing of that distant drum. Between the conqueror and the subjected tribe was a wall, denser than any steel—the same wall of mysticism of the craft that Birnier was finding so difficult to penetrate.

Every attempt to persuade any of the witch-doctors to disclose the secrets of their craft through the interpreter was doomed to failure; even had zu Pfeiffer been able to speak the dialect as well as Birnier, he would never have accomplished it. Yet he tried the impossible. The answer was invariably a mask of ox-like stupidity or the retort that he, being a mighty magician, must needs know—that he did but "tickle their feet."

At length, maddened by this persistence, he put Sakamata to the torture and had for his pains a story in which the idol, as the first man, was the father of the tribe whom the people believed to have been eaten up literally, so that the conqueror had become the father of the people, having the idol inside him.

Zu Pfeiffer was aware of the typical native habit of muddling the abstract with the concrete, so that the phrase "having the idol inside him" and the chance that the tale had a faint resemblance to an account by a Frenchman of the superstitions of a West African tribe convinced him.

Implicitly he believed the ingenious yarn invented by a wily witch-doctor to save his hide and the perquisites of his job by placating the white man, the trap into which most white chroniclers have fallen. This conviction, which flattered his sagacity and lulled any suspicions, strengthened his arm in the delivering of punishment and reward.

At the back of the curtain which bore the flags and the portrait of the Kaiser was zu Pfeiffer's private apartment, to which he retired to refresh himself with a brandy-sparklet and a cigar. Upon a temporary table made of packing-cases and set with a violet cloth was the portrait in the ivory frame at which he gazed as he smoked. In spite of the fact that he was capable of medieval cruelty, the blue eyes and the feminine lips softened as sentimentally as any old maid's; yet perhaps not in spite of, but because of, a code as fierce and as senseless as the native system of tabu, for natural emotions suppressed must find an outlet in some form.

XXIV

IN THE camp of Bakahenzie was the low mutter of the drums by day and night. The village had straggled farther through the forest in each direction, save that of the sacred enclosure. Already were there some thousands of warriors and more returning every day. Busy were Bakahenzie and wizards great and small in the preparing of amulets of the hearts of lions, livers of leopards and galls of birds and the brewing of potent decoctions to be smeared with parrot feathers upon the warriors old and young against the evil eye and the spirits of the night.

And dispensed by Bakahenzie and Marufa, from whom had come the original idea, was a special and expensive charm against the coughing monsters, which was made by, and invested with, the magic of the king-god himself, a can key.

That morning had there been a special meeting of the craft and the chiefs before the sacred enclosure, where they had looked upon the sacred form of the king-god and heard the magic elephant's ear give them instructions and a prophecy. Around and around a hundred fires flickering mystically in the moist cavern of the forest shuffled and chanted the warriors, invoking the aid of Tarum, the spirit of their ancestors.

On the threshold of his hut squatted a sullen Zalu Zako. He had discovered that he had escaped from the river bearing him to the pool of celibacy to find that the bird had been captured by another. Although he had known that before attaining his desire he would have had to extricate Bakuma from the net of the tabu, yet, loverlike and human, that task unconsidered had seemed as easy as stalking a buck in a wood.

But the joy of his own release had been dissipated as a cloud of dust by a shower by the news of M'Yalu's abduction of Bakuma and his desertion with her. Zalu Zako was so obsessed by chagrin at this wholly unexpected appearance of a rival that he was inclined to regret that he had ever thought of the move by which he could escape his late doom and rescue Bakuma at the same time.

The illusion of nearness to the desired object had served naturally to whet his appetite; the balked love motive dominated him almost to the exclusion of political affairs, including Bakahenzie's refusal to permit him to see Moon-Spirit, upon whom were based hopes of hiding Bakuma. What his official status was, now that all precedent had been broken, Bakahenzie did not know and had not decided, and Zalu Zako cared less.

Though his faith in most of the tribal theology was unshaken, he did not believe in the sanctity, or the necessity, of the marriage of the Bride of the Banana, because he had a defensive complex of desire for her that inhibited that belief. Toward M'Yalu, Zalu Zako's natural reaction was revenge. The matter was how to accomplish that end. To reveal to Bakahenzie that he was the lover of Bakuma would be tantamount to admitting sacrilege in desiring the Bride of the Banana.

As Zalu Zako was unable to get at the person of his rival, the most logical method to his mind was by witchcraft. To obtain some relics of the body of M'Yalu proved easy, as his wives and slaves, being forced to flee, had been unable to burn the deserted hut, thus leaving in the customary place in the thatch the hair and nail clippings. Also, to find an excuse for the cursing of M'Yalu was still easier.

So at a meeting of the chiefs he rivaled Bakahenzie in denunciation of the absconding chief, insisted that a mighty magic be made against him and produced the necessary corporeal parts upon which to work. So it was that Bakahenzie and Marufa, a quiet, watchful Marufa, brewed the magic brew and condemned M'Yalu by the proxy of his nail clippings to die, a process that took root in a very firm conviction in the mind of Zalu Zako and the others that die M'Yalu would.

After this satisfaction of the first fierce instinct, Zalu Zako was more at liberty to consider other matters, which resulted in the "speeding up" of the collective will to recover the tribe's country and possessions, symbolized in Zalu Zako's mind by the delicate figure of Bakuma.

The ceremony of the lighting of the new fires he had attended perfunctorily. To have regret or pity for the white man, Moon-Spirit, who had taken over his doom, never occurred to Zalu Zako, for to him as to Bakahenzie, Moon-Spirit was a mighty magician, who, if capable of making the magic he had already displayed, was capable of looking after himself; moreover, as he had recalled, the Unmentionable One stood as the incarnation of the tribe, the god, therefore beyond human pity or consideration.

Bakahenzie's chief regard was, of course, to unify the tribe once more and to rouse those who had submitted to Eyes-in-the-hands to rebellion, which was but a projection of his own desire to consolidate his position and to regain his lost prestige. He had had no need to command that the news be sent abroad, for at the ceremony of the Lighting of the Fires the drums' notes had been picked up by the nearest village and sent ricocheting across the length and breadth of the country, even rippling through the court of the Son-of-the-earthquake.

Bakahenzie's confidence had increased tenfold since by his clever coup he had locked up the white magician in the godhead. He believed that Moon-Spirit was the most mighty magician the world had ever seen, a demi-god; for had he, Bakahenzie, not seen those wondrous miracles with his own eyes? Had not he, Bakahenzie, captured and tamed this marvelous power to his own ends?

So absolute was this conviction in the

powers of the white that Bakahenzie was perfectly sincere, as Mungongo and Bakuma had been, in asserting that the "Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands was pleased to pretend that an elephant was a mouse," that he "tickled their feet." The only doubt raised in his mind at that interview was whether he could persuade this mighty being to destroy the usurper out of hand, as it were, or even whether Moon-Spirit could do so, for it was quite reasonable to him to suppose that even a god in fighting another god might have to do battle for the victory.

Not in spite of, but because of, this firm faith did Bakahenzie take more precautions than ever before to surround the captured god with the toughest fibers of the tabu to keep him in isolation. Obviously, such a valuable prize demanded special precautions. He even promulgated an ordinance, in the amplitude of his regained power, that no layman nor any wizard save the inner cult, whom he dared not forbid, were to approach within sight of the sacred enclosure. For in the jungle of his mind lurked the fear that the new god might be seen to leave the sacred ground and thus render the penalty of death imperative, according to the laws of the tabu upon a god who jeopardized the tribal welfare, as Mfunga Mpopo had done.

The belief that he could control a force which he admitted was infinitely greater than he and that he could punish it if it did not behave was not at all inconsistent to the native mind nor more illogical than similar ideas are to the minds of many whites.

* * *

AT THE last interview Bakahenzie had tried to persuade Birnier to permit him to speak into the mighty ear of the magic box; in effect an attempt to gain complete control. But Birnier, when he at length had realized that Bakahenzie's mental development was little greater than Mungongo's and keenly aware of the isolation to which he was to be subjected as well as the purpose in the witch-doctor's mind, had resolutely refused.

Bakahenzie had accepted the intimation that the god would not work miracles through any other mouth than that of his incarnation. And after a long cogitative silence he had departed without further comment.

But, of course, he came back again next day, as Birnier had known that he would. Birnier hinted at the expected initiation into the mysteries of the craft, particularly of the Festival of the Banana and the other ceremonies connected with his rôle as king-god. But Bakahenzie's gaze, fixed upon an object on the toilet table, did not quiver. Birnier repeated the inquiry more bluntly. Said Bakahenzie:

"The fingers of the son of Maliko are hungry to touch the magic knife of the Son-of-the-lord-of-the-many-lands."

"—— it," muttered Birnier. "That's my favorite!"

But he handed the razor to Bakahenzie, saying—

"Is not the porridge pot free to all brothers?"

Gravely Bakahenzie slipped the safety-razor into his loin-cloth, mumbled the orthodox adieu and departed.

Although devoted to Birnier as much as ever, Mungongo was bound just as much by the articles of the tabu as any other native; in fact, since his appointment to the high office of Keeper of the Fires, he was, if possible, more terrified by the bogies of their theology than before. Put one foot out of the sacred ground he would not, for he was convinced that immediately he did so the ghosts of the dead kings would instantly strangle him.

Birnier attempted to persuade him to get into communication with Marufa, but that wily gentleman, grieving over the failure of the coup he had aided Birnier to make and for the moment completely under the domination of Bakahenzie—who he knew had him watched every moment of the day and night—would never approach the place of the Unmentionable One.

Nor dared Zalu Zako break the tabu placed by Bakahenzie, for it was to Bakahenzie and not to Birnier that he owed his escape from the dreaded godhood. And one who had released him might quite reasonably have him back again if annoyed. The few wizards who came to gaze at the imprisoned god like children at the zoo, as Birnier had commented, were deaf to any remark, instruction or plea of the Holy One.

So it was that Birnier began to realize that the functions of a god were so very purely divine that he would never be allowed to interfere in human affairs at all except by grace of the high priest. And possibly he was not the first god who had found that out.

This jungle of secrecy and the continuous isolation from any active part in the organizing of the tribe began to irritate Birnier. Yet he perceived clearly enough from his knowledge of the native mind that any effort to force either confidence or action would end in disaster. Patience and perseverance alone would bring success—that and the molding of the material through forces which already controlled it. He must play the witch-doctor to the full. Working upon this hypothesis he determined to control Bakahenzie through "messages" from the spirit of Tarum. The trouble was to find out whether Bakahenzie would obey him or not and to what extent.

So in the early hours of one morning Bakahenzie's watchers in the jungle shuddered as they heard more of the mysterious voices of the Unmentionable One making wondrous magic within the temple as Mungongo chanted, at Birnier's prompting, the god's instructions to his high priest and people. The form of the chant was not correct, as Mungongo's memory was very unreliable; but, as Birnier remarked to the portrait of Lucille, "I don't suppose Maestro Bakahenzie is such a stylist as he would have the public suppose!"

Afterward, to the delight of Mungongo, who was never tired of any manifestation of Moon-Spirit's magic, he put out the light and lay upon his bed within the temple, listening to the voice of Lucille pouring the passion of *"Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix"* in "Samson et Delilah" to the sleepy ears of the monkeys above the figure of the idol, limned against the moon-patterned roof of the forest.

But scarcely had the moist ultramarine shadows turned to mauve when the voice of Bakahenzie hailed the god most punctiliously from without. However, Birnier happened to be sleepy, and the chance of the early hour presented such an opportunity to gain prestige that he sent the Keeper of the Fires to inform the high priest that the god was not yet up and that he must needs wait.

And wait did Bakahenzie like unto a graven image at the gate until the sun was four hand's spans above the trees. When Birnier had breakfasted upon broiled kid, eggs, banana and weak tea, Bakahenzie was summoned to the august presence.

Wondering what new idea Bakahenzie had gotten into his head, Birnier solemnly talked the usual preliminaries, intending to announce in the best manner that Tarum had a message for the son of Maliko; but to his astonishment Bakahenzie quite suddenly forestalled him by demanding to know when the god would speak again.

When Mungongo had gravely placed the machine at his feet Birnier set the record. The chant bade the son of Maliko to summon the wizards and the warriors of the tribe to the abode of the Unmentionable One; to send to those who had fallen beneath the magic of the Eyes-in-the-hands the message that they were not to reveal by word or deed that the Unmentionable One had been pleased to return, but to wait like a wildcat at a fish-pool until a signal was given through the drums, when they were to smite swiftly at every keeper of the demons and to flee immediately to their brethren in the forest; that they were on no account to kill or wound Eyes-in-the-hands nor any white man that was his, lest their powerful ghosts exact a terrible penalty and refuse to be propitiated; that when these things had been done would the spirit of Tarum issue further instructions.

In composing this message, Birnier had sought to gain the advantage of a surprize attack and to secure the massacre of as many of the *askaris* as possible, to save zu Pfeiffer and his white sergeants from the fate which would await them should they fall into the hands of the Wongolo, to minimize the loss of men which would occur were the tribe to attempt to face the guns, afterward to lure zu Pfeiffer away from his fortifications and the open country in order to compel him to fight in the forest where he could not ascertain what force was against him, and in the meantime to slip round and establish the idol in the Place of Kings—which act would consolidate the morale of the tribe as well as cut the line of zu Pfeiffer's communications with Ingonya.

As Bakahenzie listened gravely and attentively, Birnier keenly watched his face; although the mask did not quiver, a half-suppressed grunt at the end persuaded him that Bakahenzie was duly impressed, but he made no comment. After regarding

Mungongo solemnly putting away the machine, he remarked casually—

"In the village is a messenger from Eyes-in-the-hands who sends thee greetings."

This was the first news that Birnier had received since his ascent to the godhood. Although he had expected that sooner or later zu Pfeiffer would hear of the presence of a white man, he was rather startled at the inference that zu Pfeiffer was aware of his identity. But he made no visible sign as he waited. Bakahenzie took snuff interestedly and continued—

"Eyes-in-the-hands bids thee to go unto the Place of Kings to eat the dust before him."

Bakahenzie regarded him with keen eyes. Birnier considered swiftly. From the latter part of the message he gathered that zu Pfeiffer was not aware of his identity. His opinion of zu Pfeiffer's character suggested certain psychological possibilities. His policy was to lure him away from his fort, to destroy his military judgment. Therefore, to cause him at this juncture to be disturbed violently by a personal emotion might tend to confuse his mind. Enmity—fear—might equally serve as the lure received. In spite of committing a breach of native etiquette, Birnier could not resist smiling. He reached for the "Anatomy," and, as he scribbled two words, he said to Bakahenzie solemnly:

"O, son of Maliko, say unto this man of many tongues as well as many eyes that the jackal follows the lion that he may eat upon his leavings, that the voice of the hyena is loudest when he eateth offal! And will the slave take unto him that which is mighty logic, such magic that when Eyes-in-the-hands doth but touch it shall he roar like unto a wounded cow elephant! Bid him to mark that my words be white!"

And, when Bakahenzie had gone, Birnier turned to the portrait on the wall and remarked as he indulged in the luxury of a grin—

"Say, honey, but if that doesn't get him real mad I'll—I'll eat my own monographs!"

XXV

IN A corner of one of the half-completed huts in a half-completed street of the new village of the Place of Kings squatted Yabolo and other chiefs. Sakamata was up in the fort, serving Eyes-in-the-hands, so that they could talk freely, yet in low tones and with wary eyes for the interstices of the unfinished wall. More than one chief had been thrashed, but never one as high in rank as M'Yalu; moreover, those that had been severely punished had been taken in fair fight or had attempted to escape, whereas M'Yalu had done nothing that they considered to merit punishment.

The growing detestation and hatred smoldering within all of them against the new ruler had burst into flame at the first breath of the news vibrating upon the moist air. Later had come another drum message bidding them await new words of Tarum. And forty-eight hours afterward it had come through the lips of a messenger—sent by zu Pfeiffer to summon Moon-Spirit—who squatted in the group, whispered word for word Birnier's message on the phonograph, adding further instructions from Bakahenzie that the signal should be another message upon the drums, "The fire is lighted."

Warm bananas wrapped in leaves, which a slave had brought in, were placed before the chiefs while the messenger related the gossip of the village in the forest. Later, while lolling through the midday heat waiting for the time of audience, he produced from his loin-cloth the magic charm which the Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands, the king-god, had sent to Eyes-in-the-hands, which should cause him to roar like unto a wounded cow elephant. He repeated the message attached, eliciting many grunts of admiration and awe. Then he inquired for Sakamata and M'Yalu and, upon hearing the account, reported that they were both traitors and had been condemned to die by the magic of Bakahenzie and Marufa.

Each and every chief felt that he had been betrayed by Sakamata. Even Yabolo, his relative, particularly because his visionary schemes had come to naught, was against Sakamata. Sakamata had heard the message of the drums, "The fire is lighted." But of the details of the return of the Unmentionable One and of the new king-god he knew nothing, although every other Wongolo man, woman and child knew.

The terror of the tabu, of the power of the Unmentionable One, was more overwhelming than his fear of Eyes-in-the-hands, wizard and ex-member of the inner cult though he be. The Unmentionable One had returned, a miracle.

In a thousand signs of birds and beasts, twigs and shadows, Sakamata saw omens of evil. He knew that he was an outcast, that his fellows were plotting, that they knew something that he did not. Yet he dared not tell Eyes-in-the-hands, lest he be killed on the instant—not by Eyes-in-the-hands but by mystic power of the Unmentionable One.

Farther down the line in a small hut lay M'Yalu motionless. His mind was a whirling red spot of rage and pain, obliterating the image of Bakuma, his ivory and his slaves—among whom were Birnier's servants, captured with Bakuma. From the base of the spine to his neck he was crissed with bloody weals administered with a *kiboko*, whip of hippopotamus hide, by one of the black giants who formed the door guard at the tent of Eyes-in-the-hands.

More stimulating to his anger even than the excessive pain was the indignity, that he, M'Yalu, son of M'Busa, a chief, had been flogged like a slave before all men. Could he have gotten free, he would have leaped upon zu Pfeiffer, god or no, and torn him to pieces with hands and teeth. But he could scarcely move. Never had such an act been conceived by M'Yalu. The native dignity and reserve was shattered. He lay upon his stomach and glared with the eyes of a maddened and tortured animal.

The yellow glare in the open doorway was darkened, but M'Yalu did not stir. The figure of Yabolo, the short throwing-sword in hand, moved toward him and squatted down, muttering greetings. M'Yalu made no response. Yabolo repeated the message from the spirit of Tarum.

"Let thy spear be made sharp, O son of M'Busa, that we may make the jackal, who would command the lion, to eat offal!"

M'Yalu grunted.

"The son of Bayakala sayeth that it will be soon so that ye may yet eat up thy defiler ere thou art gone to ghostland."

M'Yalu turned his head.

"The son of M'Tungo and the son of Maliko," explained the old man, "have made magic upon the parts which thou didst foolishly leave within thy hut."

Again M'Yalu merely grunted and turned away his head. But that dread news had quenched the white flame of anger. The spirits were wroth; even had they caused him to eat the dust before all men. The conviction in the efficacy of the magic that he would have bought Marufa to make against Zalu Zako was as absolute as his faith in the death magic made against him by the two powerful witch-doctors, and it was intensified by the miraculous return of the Unmentionable One against whom he had committed sacrilege.

He recollected the cry of the *baroto* bird on the night on which he had kidnaped the Bride of the Banana, Bakuma. The spirit of Tarum was wroth. The mighty new king-god of the Unmentionable One was about to eat up all the enemies of the land. M'Yalu was convinced that he was doomed. He knew that Yabolo knew he was doomed. That every man knew he was doomed.

For ten minutes the figures, squatting and lying, remained as motionless as bronzes. Then M'Yalu rose to his knees and said calmly—

"Give me thy sword, O son of Zingala."

Silently Yabolo handed him the sword, which M'Yalu placed beneath him. Then he lay down again. So quietly he died.

From the sacred hill blared the harsh cry of the yellow bird, as the natives called the trumpet, announcing that the august presence was in audience. But, instead of the usual crowd of immobile figures, squatted almost under the shadow of the pom-pom within the gate of the fort sat only the messenger.

Sakamata, knowing that something portended and yet not exactly what, was so scared that his skinny limbs quivered as if with an ague. Although he desired to warn Eyes-in-the-hands in order to save himself, he dared not attempt to do so, lest the august one visit his anger upon his person; vague ideas of redeeming his treachery by delivering Eyes-in-the-hands over to his countrymen were stoppered by terror of the wrath of the Unmentionable One.

SO IT was that the pomp of the Son-of-the-earthquake and the glory of the soul of the World-Trembler with many charms upon his breast was reserved for the humble messenger who entered, escorted by Sakamata. After bowing in the prescribed manner, the messenger squatted at zu Pfeiffer's feet and addressed himself to the corporal interpreter.

"The Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands, that is the king-god of the One-not-to-be-mentioned, sends greeting to the Son-of-the-world-trembler, called the Eyes-in-the-hands, and this message: Say unto the man of many tongues as well as many eyes that the jackal follows the lion that he may eat up his leavings; the voice of the hyena is loudest when he eateth offal!"

"What does the animal say?" demanded zu Pfeiffer, impatient of the native preamble.

"He says, *Bwana*," said the interpreter, "that the white man is sick and can not move, but that he will come as soon as he is well!"

From the folds of his loin-cloth the messenger was dutifully extracting something wrapped up in a banana leaf. He handed it to the interpreter as he finished the message—

"And by his slave he sendeth that which is mighty magic—such magic that he who toucheth it shall roar like unto a wounded cow elephant."

"He says, *Bwana*," continued the interpreter glibly, "that he sends to the mighty Eater-of-men a small present," and with the words the corporal guilelessly proferred the small package.

Zu Pfeiffer took it and tore off the covering.

Then was the magic of the new king-god of the Unmentionable One made manifest to all men—and particularly a group of chiefs hiding in a small thicket beneath the hill—for indeed did the Son-of-the-earthquake roar like unto a wounded cow elephant at the sight of an American flag upon an ivory disk on which was written:

Amantes—amentes!

XXVI

ALL day at Fort Eitel, as zu Pfeiffer had officially named the Place of Kings, had been stir and bustle, the blare of trumpets and the barking of sergeants, white and black. Long lines of women and slaves streamed in from the surrounding countryside, bearing loads of corn and bananas. In the half-made parade-ground at the foot of the hill of Kawa Kendi half a company of Wongolo, whom zu Pfeiffer had conscripted from the chiefs, stumbled and ran in awkward squads.

In the hut of the Wongolo chiefs squatted Yabolo among the rest, silently observing the preparations for the punitive expedition, which, Sakamata had informed them, was being prepared in response to the insolent challenge of the white man who had allied himself with the "rebels." But over them as well as every Wongolo in and about the place was a sullen air, not of defiance but of expectant listening.

In the mess hut a nervous Bakunjala prepared the table for dinner, the whites of his eyes rolling at every sound of zu Pfeiffer's voice from the marquee adjoining. Never in his experience had the demon so utterly possessed the dread Eater-of-men as since the receipt of some terrible magic sent to him by the white man.

Opinion was divided as to whether this white man was the one who had been arrested and sent to the coast with Corporal Inyira or whether he was a brother. Some said that the magic "leaf" which the messenger had brought was the soul of the white man; others maintained that it was the incarnation of Bakra, which explained why the Eater-of-men was so entirely possessed. Had he not screamed? Which clearly proved, as everybody knew, the dreadful agony as the ghost had entered into the body.

Even the white sergeants were frightened of their chief. They had been seen talking together secretly, doubtless discussing what medicine they could give him to exorcise the demon. Had he not been commanded by this demon to leave the safety of the fort, where they had the guns on the hills, and to follow this demon into the forest, where, as anybody knew, their eyes would be taken from them so that they could not see to kill the dogs of Wongolo?

They were all conscious, nativelike, that something was brewing among the Wongolo, but, what it was exactly, they did not know. Two men had had fifty lashes that morning because they had not saluted the magic cloth—the flag—correctly, and a Wongolo chief had been shot because he had not brought in the amount of ivory commanded. None dared to warn the Eater-of-men.

Some one had said that the "leaf" was the soul of the idol come to lead the Eater-of-men to destruction. This idea took deep root among the Munyamwezi soldiers, for, although they had delighted in the slaughter and rapine under the leadership of the Eater-of-men, yet always had there been an uneasy feeling of sacrilege in destroying an idol.

In the half of the marquee reserved for the *Kommandant's* private quarters sat zu Pfeiffer in his camp-chair with the inevitable "stinger" at his elbow. Erect by the door stood Sergeant Schultz, taking details for the disposition of stores and troops during the absence of the punitive expedition. Never had he in two years service seen the lieutenant as he was now. Although Schultz could speak Kiswahili fluently, he knew no word of Munyamwezi, else he might have been disposed to agree with Bakunjala and his friends.

As it was, he thought that the *Herr Leutnant* had gotten a touch of the sun or was drinking too heavily—or perhaps a bit of both; for, to his mind, the act of dividing up their scanty forces and leaving their fortified positions to enter the forest with no chance of keeping open the line of communication appeared to be military suicide.

He deemed it his duty to bring this point of view to his *Kommandant's* notice, but he was uncomfortably aware of zu Pfeiffer's headstrong character.

"What time does the moon set, Sergeant?" demanded zu Pfeiffer.

"About three, Excellence."

"Good. Then at five precisely the column will move. Warn Sergeant Ludwig."

"*Ja*, Excellence."

"You will transfer the remainder of your men and the Nordenfelt here as soon as we have gone."

"*Ja*, Excellence."

"That is all, Sergeant."

Zu Pfeiffer dropped his head wearily on to his hand. Schultz remained rigid by the door. Zu Pfeiffer glanced up peevishly.

"I said that that was all, Sergeant," he exclaimed techily.

"*Ja*, Excellence."

"*Herr Gott!* What are you standing there for like a stuffed pig?"

Schultz saluted.

"Excellence, it is my duty to remind your Excellence that according to regulation 47 of——"

"To —— with you and your regulations, —— you. Will you leave me alone?" The last was almost a plea.

"Excellence!"

Schultz saluted briskly and went. Again zu Pfeiffer's head dropped on to the cupped hand and he gazed at the portrait in the ivory frame. Against the blue twilight of the door appeared a tall figure in white.

"What in the name of —" began zu Pfeiffer.

"*Chakula tayari, Bwana,*" announced Bakunjala timidly.

"I don't want any *chakula,*" said zu Pfeiffer. "Wait. Bring some here."

"*Bwana!*"

Bakunjala fled, but reappeared almost instantly with a covered plate which he placed on the table as bidden and again vanished. Zu Pfeiffer regarded distastefully his favorite dish of curried eggs. Then he bawled irritably—

"Lights, animal!"

"*Bwana!*" gasped Bakunjala, appearing in the doorway with the lamp.

BUT zu Pfeiffer pushed the plate away to stare at the photograph of Lucille. The stare turned to a glare and then, as if mutinying against his god as Kawa Kendi had done when summoning rain, he suddenly snatched at the frame and flung it upon the floor with an oath, grabbed up a fountain pen and began to write.

Indeed zu Pfeiffer was half-insane with anger, which he was disposed to vent upon Lucille by proxy as the source of yet another trouble and possibly official disgrace. He had not had a notion that Birnier could have escaped from the gentle hands of the corporal until without warning came that card bearing the Stars and Stripes and "*Amantes—Amentes!*" scribbled beneath, which not only inferred that Birnier had escaped but that he was near to him and intended to champion these native dogs against the Imperial Government in the person of himself.

The message had been made the more insulting by the note of exclamation at the end, implying derisive laughter. It had, as Birnier had calculated that it would, struck zu Pfeiffer upon the most tender spot in his mental anatomy, evoking a homicidal mania which dominated his consciousness. To be cheated, to be swindled, to be sworn at, cursed, even to be beaten was sufferable to a degree, but to be laughed at—zu

Pfeiffer's haughty soul exploded like a bomb at an impact.

For a time he had been absolutely incoherent with rage. His one impulse had been to rush out to tear Birnier limb from limb. Well might the listening natives believe in the mighty magic of the new king-god, that it should make the Son-of-the-earthquake to trumpet like a wounded cow elephant.

Then out of the dissolving acrid smoke of wounded pride began to loom arbitrary points. First, that Birnier would have written, as he once had threatened to do, to Washington, which would infuriate the authorities in Berlin; second, that he would have written as well to Lucille, revealing the attempt he had made upon the life of her husband as well as the things he had said.

How Birnier had escaped was immaterial, but the particular fate that awaited Corporal Inyira was decided—but futilely; for the bold son of Banyala and his merry men were footing it to the south of Lake Taganyika, scared by day—lest the long arm of the Eater-of-men should overtake them—and haunted by the terror of seeing another illuminated ghost by night.

As the jeweled hand glittered in the lamplight came the mutter of a distant drum on the moist darkness. Zu Pfeiffer, abnormally irritable, raised his head, scowled and, muttering that he would have to issue an order to have the drums stopped, bent again to the uncongenial task of finishing the report due for headquarters before he left. The drum ceased; then it began again and was answered by another drum seemingly nearer at hand.

Five or ten minutes elapsed. As zu Pfeiffer took up a fresh sheet of paper, a shot rang out, followed instantly by terrific yells. Zu Pfeiffer with an oath sprang to his feet, snatched at the revolver hanging above his camp-bed and rushed out as a fusillade of shots mingled with wilder cries. The gruff coughs of the corporal in charge of the guard competed with the sharp barks of Sergeant Schultz.

Zu Pfeiffer, roaring for a sergeant, ran to the great gate where the pom-pom was stationed. On the opposite hill red flashes of rifle-fire darted downward. Came an outburst of yelling. Forms of *askaris*, scurrying to their places around the fence, brushed by him on every side.

"Sergeant Schultz!" roared zu Pfeiffer.

A figure in white appeared beside him in the darkness.

"Excellence!"

"Put the gun on them! Quick!"

At the bark of the sergeant the gun crew, already at their post, deftly manipulated the machine, which coughed angry red bursts of flame into the darkness. The yells and shouts below ceased as suddenly as they had begun.

"Cease firing!" commanded zu Pfeiffer.

The crew obeyed.

In the resulting stillness muttered shouts and cries from somewhere in the village below were punctuated by odd shots from the other hill.

"Sergeant Ludwig!" roared zu Pfeiffer.

"Excellence!"

"Report!" snapped zu Pfeiffer.

"An unknown body of natives attacked and killed the sentry on the eastern gate, Excellence," came Sergeant Ludwig's voice from the darkness. "They entered and were repulsed according to instructions. That is all, Excellence."

"Losses?"

"None, Excellence."

"What about the lower guards?"

"I do not know, Excellence."

"Take a platoon and investigate. We will cover you with the gun."

"Excellence!"

The mutter of his orders was drowned in the excited jabber of the *askaris*.

"*Didimalla!*" roared the dreaded voice of the Eater-of-men.

Instantly there was silence.

"Report!" commanded zu Pfeiffer to Sergeant Schultz.

"A body of natives attacked upon the western gate, Excellence! They were repulsed."

"Losses?"

"Two men killed and three wounded."

"Um. Where's Sakamata?"

"*Bwana!*"

Cloth creaked as the man saluted in the dark.

"Where is Sakamata?" demanded zu Pfeiffer in Kiswahili.

"Here, Excellency!" replied Sergeant Schultz. "He was running away. I had him arrested."

"Good. Bring the animal to my quarters."

"Excellence!"

THE sergeant and the interpreter, with a trembling Sakamata between them, followed zu Pfeiffer to the tent. As he entered, he picked up the portrait in the ivory frame and replaced it carefully on the table and sat down.

"Ask the *shenzie* why he has not warned us of this attack?"

The interpreter put the question to the terrified old man, who mumbled that he had not known anything about it.

"Um," grunted zu Pfeiffer. "Send for a file of men, Sergeant, and— No!" Zu Pfeiffer rose. "I'll get the truth out of him. Stand aside, Corporal!"

The corporal obeyed with alacrity, as, jerking his revolver downward, zu Pfeiffer pulled the trigger. The shot took off two of Sakamata's smaller toes. The corporal grinned in appreciation. Zu Pfeiffer experienced a shadow of the pleasure he would have had in mutilating Birnier.

"Pull it up!" commanded zu Pfeiffer. "Now ask him again!"

For a moment or two the old man, scarcely conscious of any pain in his fright, could not comprehend what was said; at length he mumbled and muttered. The interpreter lowered his head to listen.

"Well?"

"He says, *Bwana*, that he does not know anything; that they will not tell him, but that he has heard that the god has come back."

"The god! What god?"

"The god which these *shenzie* (savages) had here before the *Bwana* came."

"The idol!" Zu Pfeiffer ripped out an oath.

Then, glaring questioningly at the shrunken figure on the floor, he considered.

"Tell him he lies. How does he know that the idol has come back if they will not tell him anything?"

Again the interpreter jabbered at Sakamata, who mumbled back.

"He says, *Bwana*, that his words are white. That they have not told him, but that he has heard the message of the drums, 'The fire is lighted!' "

"What is that?"

"I don't know, *Bwana*."

"Ask him, you swine-pig!"

"He says that whenever there is a new king that they call out those words, meaning that he is come."

"Um." Zu Pfeiffer took out a cigar and lighted it as he considered. "I believe the animal is right," he reflected. "That *schweinhund* American has done this!" He turned sharply to Sergeant Schultz. "Post double guards, bring me Ludwig's report and take this thing away and have it shot."

"Excellence!"

The party went out. Zu Pfeiffer sat smoking fiercely. A single shot rang out. Presently came Sergeant Ludwig in person.

"I have to report, Excellence, that the investigation infers that the attack was made with the purpose of freeing the sons of chiefs only, for the picket has been slain, but all the others are unhurt, save three wounded."

Zu Pfeiffer swore mightily, but he dismissed the sergeant with an admonition to have his troops ready for inspection at four-thirty. He drank a brandy neat and sat on, staring at the darkness. Then suddenly he exclaimed and wheeled to the abandoned report.

"This is an undeniable overt act," he muttered, seeing what he considered an opportunity to neutralize the supposititious report which Birnier had sent to Washington. And, taking up the pen, he began a formal accusation against Birnier for having violated the international laws of the Geneva Convention by aiding and abetting rebels of his Imperial Majesty.

XXVII

SERGEANT SCHULTZ'S gloomy foreboding of the inevitable result attending the refusal to follow the teachings of his national preceptors was justified.

Zu Pfeiffer, crazed with magic or wounded pride—according to the black or white point of view—had held rigidly to his schedule; precisely at four-thirty he had inspected the expedition, and he had marched at the first streak of dawn. Schultz removed to the other hill, leaving twenty-five men and a gun under a black sergeant. Afterward he visited the village.

The bodies of five of the picket were lying in the sun, mutilated. Not a native of any sort was to be seen or heard. He sent out scouts. A village a couple of miles away was deserted, too. He wished to burn the huts and plantation to clear the ground around the fort, but he dared not do so without orders. Muttering to himself, he returned and posted double sentries.

Throughout the day and the moonlight not a sound of a drum or the voice of a native disturbed the moist heat. He slept for a while and then took to pacing the levee outside the fort. He was aware of a restlessness among the men. About midnight a nervous sentry fired at a moving shadow in the village. Erratic shots followed, flickered and ceased at the sergeant's angry order. The trees seemed to whisper mockingly. The sergeant decided that it must have been a prowling jackal or hyena. But the incident made him irritable.

In ordinary circumstances he would have posted picket sentries as provided by the regulations, but he could not spare any of his fifty men, for, in the case of an attack, they would never regain the fort. The moon sank as if reluctantly, seeming to hesitate upon the fringe of banana fronds at something that she alone could see. But the night creaked slowly on. Schultz knew that the favorite hour for an attack was just at the first glimmer of dawn, when the spirits are making for their homes and the light is deceptive.

He was standing in front of the Nordenfelt when a sentry's keener eyes caught a peculiar whispering rustle. As Schultz turned his head to listen, the whisper grew in volume to the sound of a hail-storm, the patter of bare feet on sand. Faint light on spears rippled round the base of the hills. Schultz sprang inside the barrier, barking at his men to open fire. He deflected the muzzle of his gun and began pumping nickel into the advancing mass of yelling figures.

The first rush carried the fort, for the defenders were outnumbered by fifty to one. Schultz fell under a dozen spear-thrusts. The *askaris* were massacred to a man before the sun rose inquiringly beyond the sacred hill of Kawa Kendi.

When all the bloody acts of war were done and the triumphant yelling quieted, there came from across the river a pulsing trickle of sound in the sizzling heat, which was answered by a thundering crash of spear against shield and the "*Ough! Ough!*" of three thousand warriors gathered upon the hill to do homage to the Unmentionable One.

Across the river at the ford where Bakuma had sung her swan song came the procession, led by the craft in full panoply. In the van stalked Bakahenzie, grave and solemn as befitted the high priest. Around him capered with untiring energy a group of lesser wizards whose duties were as those of the professional dancers, having dried bladders and magic beads fastened to their ankles and wrists.

Then behind Marufa a litter was borne by sacred slaves—doomed to perish after performing their holy office—in which, swathed entirely from the public gaze, was Usakuma, the incarnation of the Unmentionable One. In another litter as securely screened was the Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands, endeavoring to endure a perpetual bath of sweat in the sacred cause, peeking professional eyes at the interstices, scribbling in a note-book.

Behind again marched Mungongo, bearing a smoldering brand of the sacred fire; then came Yabolo, reinstated in office for a reason that any politician will understand. After him came more litters bearing the magic "things" of the incarnation of an incarnation, the king-god.

As they splashed across the river, women and girls dashed like troups of bronze gazelle, eager to gather power and fertility from the water enchanted by the passage of the Bearer of the World.

So they came through the banana plantation and up the wide street which the Son-of-the-earthquake had planned. Their chant quavered like a dragon-fly in the sun, and the chorus of the warriors replied with the rhythm and the profundity of Gargantuan frogs. Then, as Bakahenzie stepped upon the incline of the hill, burst from the women the cricket song, which is made tremolo by the rapid beating of the fingers upon the lips. And from the drums went out the message over the land that the Unmentionable One had indeed returned to the Place of Kings, the City of the Snake.

Ten minutes later a half-stewed god, as exhausted as any emperor after a state parade, was permitted to emerge from the litter and to recuperate within the cool of the house that was to have been the bungalow of the *Kommandant*. No one else, save the keeper of the fires, Bakahenzie and Marufa, were within the palisade which ringed the fort. Outside were the mutter and rumble of the warriors and the cries of the women.

The huddled lines of huts which had been barracks were already in process of demolition at the hands of the slaves, and the square within the fort was cleared of the slain by the simple process of heaving the bodies over the palisade. The idol remained within the litter until the consecrating of the defiled ground should be performed by Bakahenzie and the craft.

No Wongolo or any wizard, not even Bakahenzie, would touch the enchanted coughing monsters, but, as the holy slaves were already doomed, they were set to pull and to push the Nordenfelt from the embrasure beside the entrance across the levee until it toppled over and rolled halfway down the hill, where it was allowed to stay, surrounded from morning to night by a crowd of women, children and idle warriors.

THE thirst which afflicted Birnier rendered him oblivious of his godhood and of the sacred office of Mungongo, who was dutifully busy upon his knees, blowing up the sacred fires from the ember which he had carried. So, at a summons to bring water, he was both embarrassed and awed for the presence of the high priest intensified his natural terror of breaking any of the meshes of the tabu.

At the second imperative demand it was Bakahenzie who soothed the angry god by commanding a slave to run to fetch water from without, but even then Birnier had the parched felicity of waiting while the high priest solemnly exorcised the gourd of water, which, as all food, could not be permitted to pass the lips of the king-god without the proscribed incantations.

However, within quite a reasonable time the sacred prisoner was accommodated with the possession of his goods, magic and culinary. The half-built house which was to have been the bungalow of the *Kommandant*, Birnier gathered, was to be converted into the temple after the ceremony of purification, and the idol was to stand in front of it, overlooking, as it had in the days of old, the valley and the village beneath.

All that day Bakahenzie and Marufa and the wizards worked hard at the various ceremonies of purification of those who had slain, the consecration of the holy hill and the exorcising of the evil spirits attached thereto by late residence of the Son-of-the-earthquake. Meanwhile Birnier and Mungongo were left to themselves within the palisade to listen to the chanting and the thrumming of the drums. Birnier had much to do in compiling his notes and reflections: Mungongo nothing save to prepare their meals and attend the sacred fires.

Exactly what had happened, Birnier did not know and could not extract from Bakahenzie, who adopted his usual effective method of ignoring every direct question. Before they had left the place in the forest, he had directly informed Birnier that the commands of the spirit of Tarum through the magic ear had been performed; but with what restrictions, modifications or embroideries, Birnier had no means of knowing.

His definite knowledge was that Zalu Zako, together with other chiefs and a vast crowd of warriors, was to remain in the forest, where zu Pfeiffer was to be led into ambush by the power of the magic which he had sent, the American flag—an idea which certainly tickled Birnier's sense of humor considerably—particularly as it appealed to him, if successful, as an ideal case of poetic justice.

That zu Pfeiffer's fort had fallen was, of course, obvious; although what the disposition of his forces had been and of how the assault had been carried, Birnier had no idea. But of one thing he was reasonably sure, and that was that his analysis of zu Pfeiffer's reactions and the psychological effect of having the idol reinstated in the Place of Kings had been entirely correct.

After all, as he admitted with a smile, zu Pfeiffer's knowledge of native psychology had been based on the same fundamental principles as his own, except that the German had not reckoned with the unknown quantity, the equal intelligence working against him and able to discount his moves, plus heavier artillery in the form of an emotional broadside for which, rather naturally, he had not been prepared.

An item which worried Birnier was that he had no means, and could hope for none, apparently, of knowing whether—and to what extent—this orders through the phonograph had been carried out regarding the treatment of the white men. Their fate at the hands of the Wongolo, particularly after the merciless massacres inflicted by zu Pfeiffer, would scarcely bear imagining.

From the fact of the instant—and apparently easy—success of the assault on the forts, he did not doubt that zu Pfeiffer, who had been foolish enough to be lured into dividing his forces, was doomed to defeat. In this instance zu Pfeiffer would not have any of the advantages of his triumphal entry into the country; he would not be able to accomplish a surprize attack and the weakening of the native morale by massacre and the downfall of the idol. In fact, he had these very forces against him; for the success of their first adventure, their overwhelming numbers in the forest, the exaltation of fanaticism excited by the restoration of their tribal god, practically tacked a label of suicide upon his military actions.

During that day Bakahenzie, evidently too busy with the duties of his position, did not come near to him. But that evening, in order to ensure as far as possible the obedience to his orders—through the mouth of the oracle—Birnier caused Mungongo to chant further instructions into the phonograph, commanding that the Son-of-the-earthquake was to be brought alive to receive judgment from the Unmentionable One through the incarnation, the Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands.

Whether this would work or not, Birnier, of course, could not know. Already had he discovered that nobody could control the complicated machinery of the native tabu any more than any one statesman could always manage any vast political machine; indeed, he, as many others, might more than conceivably be ground up by the Gargantuan engine with whose starting lever he had played. All he could do had been done; nothing remained but to adopt Marufa's favorite maxim—"Wait and see."

In the evening Mungongo, who had at length been persuaded to project his eyes beyond the sacred ground even if he would not his feet, reported that much chanting and drumming indicated that the warriors, or a great number of them, had departed, evidently to reinforce the troops of Zalu Zako or with the object of taking zu Pfeiffer in the rear—a fact which made Birnier a little uneasy lest the news of the fall of the station might bring zu Pfeiffer to his senses and cause him to return, in which case the position might prove to be somewhat uncomfortable.

However, the night passed to the soft thrumming of the drums. At dawn appeared Bakahenzie as solemn as usual. He began by demanding that the "pod of the soul" of Tarum should be prepared to listen to him. Birnier observed a slight increase in the domineering manner and realized more keenly that unless he checked that tendency the worthy high priest would become altogether unmanageable.

BIRNIER commanded Mungongo to bring forth the instrument and reproduced for Bakahenzie's benefit the oration of the previous night. Bakahenzie listened solemnly, grunted acquiescence and again made his request. Birnier refused abruptly. Again Bakahenzie grunted acceptance, which caused Birnier to speculate upon what move the wily doctor had in mind.

However, Bakahenzie, after the usual starting of false trails, announced that the consecration of the idol would take place that day and began to instruct the new god in his divine duties. That there was something unusual in the form, either exaggerated or curtailed, Birnier gathered from Bakahenzie's method of expounding the rites. The solution came in the announcement, just before leaving, that as soon as the Son-of-the-earthquake had been "eaten up" that he, Bakahenzie, would summon the craft and the people to the Harvest Festival.

The form of the statement again drew Birnier's attention to the fact that Bakahenzie was assuming the reins of power far too fast for his satisfaction. Unless he contrived to put on the curb, he would never attain the goal of a beneficent agent nor be able to satisfy his professional curiosity.

However, when he had gone, Birnier began anew to question Mungongo regarding the reputed ceremonies of the festival. But beyond the fact that it was an occasion allied to the Christian-Pagan festival of a kind of thanksgiving for the harvest and sacrifice of a victim to the god, which involved the ceremony of the marriage of the Bride of the Banana, Mungongo knew nothing.

In the afternoon Birnier was required to preside at the consecrating of the ground and the setting up of the idol. But all he had to do was to squat silently in front of the new temple before Bakahenzie and the group of the cult while the concourse of the other wizards and the few chiefs that were not away grunted a pneumonic chorus upon the levee without.

The ceremony was disappointing as ceremonies go, for beyond the stewing in the great calabash of a magic concoction with which to anoint the hole for the feet of the idol, the door posts of the temple and the house of fires, to the accompaniment of the usual chanting and drumming, it was ended by a dance with Bakahenzie as the *premier danseur*.

After his evening meal of boiled chicken, goat flesh and milk, Birnier squatted in the doorway of his new quarters, smoking. He had no lights, as his store of carbide was finished. Before leaving for the forest to carve the incarnation of the new Unmentionable One, he had had the forethought to send another messenger to the appointed village on the great lake to intercept his carriers with goods and the mail for which he had sent after escaping from the noble son of Banyala. After his coronation he had informed Bakahenzie of the coming of a fresh stock of magic and impressed upon him that great precaution must be taken to insure that it came directly to him lest contact with strangers should offend the spirits. Bakahenzie had assented in his usual noncommittal manner, a manner that was beginning to get upon Birnier's nerves.

As he smoked, staring up at the great moon over the sinister head of the idol framed in the green light, he observed that the day after the next would be the full moon, the harvest moon, the time of the yearly festival. Then with the coincidence, which sometimes seems to have a telepathic basis of explanation, he heard a curious soft sound from apparently behind the hut. Mungongo, squatting near his sacred fires in the immobile manner of the native, heard the sound, too. Again a sibilant whisper almost like the hiss of a snake brought a "*Clk*" of astonishment to Mungongo's lips. He rose swiftly and disappeared behind the hut. Another muffled exclamation of astonishment aroused Birnier's curiosity. He followed to find Mungongo leaning over the palisade as if speaking to some one.

"*Ehh!*" murmured a familiar voice. "'Tis Moon-Spirit!"

With a grunt of horror Mungongo turned upon Birnier and began to push him away, gasping:

"She is accursed! If the evil of her eyes rest upon thee, thou art ill unto death!"

"The devil take you!" muttered Birnier, angry at the touch of force; then, recollecting that the tabu forbade alien eyes to rest upon his sacred body upon which the world depended, he realized that Mungongo was trying to save him.

He held him off by the arms, saying:

"Be quiet, thou fool! Hath not my magic shown thee that I am above all magic?"

Mungongo appeared to consider that there was some truth in the statement; at any rate it gave him something to think about. He stood passively but as if momentarily expecting Birnier, magic or no, to melt before his eyes. Bending over the palisade, Birnier saw the slender form of Bakuma crouched against the earth.

"What dost thou here, O little one?" he whispered, for, of course, he knew nothing of her abduction by M'Yalu and afterward by the *askaris*.

SO HORROR-STRUCK at her own temerity in approaching the person of the King-god was she that she dared not raise her eyes as she faltered back—

"A demon hath driven the bird of my soul into the net of thy wrath."

"Still the black wings in thy breast, O Bakuma," said Birnier, trying to soothe the child. "Come thou within and show thy father thy bosom."

"*Ehh! Ehh!*" gasped Bakuma, quivering in greater panic than ever.

Aware of the danger, Birnier stooped, took her by the arms and lifted her over the palisade, remarking the violent trembling of the frail little body, whose limbs seemed like candles.

"Come thou," said Birnier, moving toward the hut.

But she cowered where he had dumped her, covering her eyes with her hands so that she gazed not upon the sacred body. Mungongo stood like a tree, the whites of terrified eyes glimmering in the moonlight. Birnier picked up the little body and carried her into the hut, followed by a knee-trembling Keeper of the Sacred Fires.

"Go, thou fool," commanded Birnier, "and watch that none approach!"

Mungongo gasped. But, in spite of his fear, he obeyed.

"Now, little one," continued Birnier, "bare thy bosom that I may know how to make the magic of healing."

Squatting against the lintel, her emaciated arms still covering her eyes, Bakuma strove to obey. At length she faltered out the story of her double abduction. The capture by the *askaris* had made but little difference to her, for, as she phrased it, the beak of her soul was like unto the mouth of the crocodile.

Her captor had thrust her into a hut in the village, together with some other women captives, but, as the man had had to continue his military duties, night had fallen before he returned. By which time she had bribed some of the women, whose captivity was not as loathsome to them as the pride of their race should have made it, with a powerful charm which Birnier had given her, a nickel-plated razor-strop.

She had escaped. But more fearful of her doom as the Bride of the Banana than she was of M'Yalu or the *askaris*, she had hidden in the forest, living upon wild fruit and roots. Then had she heard from the drums of the return of the Unmentionable One and, aware that Moon-Spirit had gone into the forest to seek him, had guessed that he was triumphant.

Away in the forest she had heard the sound of the rejoicing at the homecoming of the king-god; she had hesitated and at last she had come to Moon-Spirit in spite of his divinity in the fluttering hope of aid, driven by a demon to break the dread tabu, the same "demon" which drives so many to break "magic circles"—the subconscious love motive.

"Poor kid!" commented Birnier to himself as he regarded the pitiful, cowering form. "We haven't gotten the nuptial torches for you yet, but we will, by ——! Give me thine ear, O little one."

But as he talked to her, soothing her terror by promises of mightier magic, came Mungongo, announcing in a whisper that Bakahenzie was claiming audience. At the back of the next room of the bungalow, built upon a plan of the one in Ingonya, was a bathroom, and into that was Bakuma hurried and bidden to lie as quiet as a crocodile.

XXVIII

BAKAHENZIE had come to announce that the certain magic "things" which a messenger had brought from the white man's country had arrived. Although he could not expect an answer to his letter to Lucille in Europe, there might be other letters, and such an event as the receipt of a mail once in six months is likely to be exciting.

Birnier forgot his rôle for the moment and leaped to his feet, preparatory to rushing out to meet the runner, but a grunt from Bakahenzie and an alarmed cry from Mungongo were just in time to prevent him from jeopardizing the stability of the world and all that he had won by breaking the tabu in stepping beyond the sacred ground.

Other gods and emperors have indeed wrecked empires through a lesser aberration. Even realization of the penalty was scarce enough to hobble his impatient legs, for the very suggestion of what the mail represented melted the fetters of this native world as wax in the sun.

Indeed, more effort of will was required to return to his godlike throne upon the camp-bed and to amble through the etiquette which discussion of such an important matter demanded than to carry the idol on his back through the forest and bear the sound thrashing to boot. Then as a further test Bakahenzie slowly developed a dictum that the magic things could not be permitted to enter the sacred enclosure until they had been disenfected from the multitude of evil eyes through which they must have passed. At that the god came near to swearing or weeping. He did not know which.

But, as he fumed inwardly, he recollected that at any moment Zalu Zako and his troops might return; or if the battle had gone the other way, then zu Pfeiffer. And in such case the excitement of the former would still further delay the goods and the mail and the latter event might entail a complete loss. As well as the growing irritation caused by Bakahenzie's interminable list of tabus was the necessity of proclaiming, or rather winning, his authority before he could be of any assistance either to Bakuma, the white men or himself.

Indeed, he had been waiting the arrival

of these supplies to secure the subjection of Bakahenzie to his will. He determined that the trial should be now. Merely to demand would, he felt, arouse the obstinacy of the chief witch-doctor, who would never, unless compelled by force or cunning, give up the reins of power which to him was the *raison d'être* of his life.

Birnier must attack through the line of least resistance. With the carriers bearing the mail was a case of "imprisoned stars"—rockets—and a special moving-picture outfit. So Birnier felt that he could afford to explode the last manifestation of magic which remained to him. After a judicious interval he said to Bakahenzie—

"O son of Maliko, is not my tongue the tongue of the Unmentionable One?"

"He who knoweth all things knoweth that which is white," retorted Bakahenzie.

"Verily. Therefore, do thou cause to be brought that which is come, that which the fingers of the Unmentionable One are hungry to touch. Thou knowest his power of magic; therefore are the evil eyes of the multitude but dry leaves in the wind of his breath."

"Indeed thy words are white, O Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands."

"Depart then that the hunger of his fingers may be appeased."

"The drums speak not yet of the eating up of Eyes-in-the-hands. Hath not the ear of the spirit of Tarum spoken upon these matters?" inquired Bakahenzie in his favorite dialectical manner.

"The spirit of Tarum hath nought to say to thee," replied Birnier, "but the fingers of Tarum will make thee to itch even as his fingers."

Birnier called to Mungongo, who brought and placed at his feet a fairly powerful electric battery. Bakahenzie eyed the box; curiosity was keenly awakened. He stared interestedly when Birnier raised the lid. Taking the handles Birnier said:

"These, O son of Maliko, are the hands of Tarum made manifest. He wishes that thou shouldst feel the itch of his desire!"

And with the words he clapped one handle to the stomach and the other at the base of the spine of the chief witch-doctor. Bakahenzie convulsed considerably, as he was compelled to do. Swiftly Birnier applied the shock to the shoulders, holding the handles there as he remarked to a violently trembling Bakahenzie—

"Behold the itch of the fingers of Tarum!"

But, as he lowered his hands toward the spine again, Bakahenzie moved rapidly and with no dignity.

Solemnly Birnier replaced the handles and closed the lid and said quietly—

"Thou hast seen, O brother magician, that the fingers of Tarum do itch indeed?"

"Truly," responded Bakahenzie with a celerity as unusual as the quaver in his voice. "Indeed thy words are white, O mightiest of magicians. What indeed are the evil eyes of savages against the power of thy magic, O Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands?"

And, contrary to all precedent, Bakahenzie rose and left. Within a quarter of an hour his voice announced that slaves with the magic "things" were without the palisade and called upon Mungongo to go out, as strangers were forbidden even to look upon the king-god. Birnier by the light of a torch opened the mail, sent a great wad of letters and several sheafs of telegraph slips on to the floor and snatched a long green envelope scrawled in French characters addressed to—

Monsieur le Gardien du Jardin des Plantes.

For a moment he stared at it perplexedly, for there was no stamp or cancellation.

"What in the name—" he muttered as he slit it open.

Entebbe.
Août 13, 19—.

Mon petit loup, what have you been doing? Where are you? And why? Oh, I am cross with you, Mister Professor! Why do you write so ridiculous a letter? I laugh! But always I laugh! So what good is that to you? I will not reply to your letter. Never! But I will tell you so that you may know why I am here. Yes! Among your animals!

Birnier winced at the phrase which seemed to come back to him like a boomerang from the lips of zu Pfeiffer.

I am to go for vacation to Wiesbaden with some terrible peoples. Oh, they bore me! I have an engagement for the Winter in Berlin as before. I have engagement for Paris. Oh! But—*pouf!* Imagine me on the charming *Lusitania* and I am sitting on the deck where you once make yourself so ridiculous? Do you recall? I am sick. No, *mon vieux*, not *mal de mer!* I should not be for everybody to look at! Oh, no, I am sick, I tell you. I dream of my *petit coco* among the animals! I tell myself, '*Zut!* He is crazy! He is drunk! But all the same I him adore! *Tout de suite,*' I tell a

> creature who brings me my books, my fan; *Voilà*, I am going, me! He ask me where? I tell him I go to look for *mon amant* in *Afrique Centrale!* He think I am mad! I tell him so, and I laugh my head! How I laugh! Yes, I am the crazy wild—for you!
>
> *Alors* I come to Marseilles, and I catch one boat to Mombasa. Ouch! I come to die because of *mon petit loup!* The Sea Red! What nighthorse! *Enfin!* I still arrive what of Lucille is left and I ask for you, Mister Professor American. But no one know you. On the boat I have attached to myself three musketeers English. They are so funny! They bring me on the ever so funny little train to here Entebbe. The English, you know, are very polished. The governor he stop drinking the whisky so politely to tell me that *monsieur* had but gone three days! Think thou! I ask myself what I have done that the good God should be so unkind? Then what misery! I recall to myself that I have commence to come to you on the Friday! You laugh! Yes? I laugh too! But—*quien sabe?* I commence to come on a Friday and you are gone three little days! *V'là!*
>
> Then my three good friends, the musketeers, send for me what they call a "runner"—the green peas? *C'est drôle!* But the little black pea he did not find you. He bring a message that you had gone to some place with a terrible name. Yes!
>
> Then come the two most ridiculous letters. I will not reply to such ridiculous letters! Never!

Birnier scowled.

"Two letters?" he muttered. "What letters?"

> You must come now! Immediately. I want you. I will wait here for you. You must leave your animals ridiculous as I have left my affairs for you. Come to me. I wait for you.

Lower down on the same page was written with a thick pen:

> Again I have read your absurd letter. You are mad! You make such a noise because this foolish young man is jealous of my husband and make you to go around the detestable country which you so much like instead of straight through to the ridiculous place you say you want to go.

Birnier smiled grimly.

> *Pouf!* Listen! my dear! It is true that I have met young men in Washington, *Mon Dieu;* are there not plenty in Paris, Berlin, London? He fell in love with me. But, *Mon Dieu*, they are as thick as the blackberries! Perhaps I tease him. Who knows? Why not? I give him a photograph and I sign it as I sign plenty for all my friends. But then he become too ridiculous. He has no sense of humor, like all the Germans. He wishes to fight all my friends, your compatriots, so somber and grave! Imagine! Then he make a challenge and *naturellement*—it is not the custom in your country. *Mon pauvre petit* Dorsay refuse, and this person become crazy wild and he kill him. *Quel scandale!* He run away, of course. The embassy help him. Who knows? This is the last I hear until I receive this ridiculous letter together with thy ridiculous letter. I send him to you. How funny that you meet him among the animals! It is so funny that he did not kill you, too, this monster German! You are still so cross yet? *Zut, mon vieux,* it is not the fault of mine that everybody go crazy wild after me except my little husband! Leave the ridiculous *garçon* where he is. But why do I talk so much about a *cochon?* Because you are ridiculous, too. Now be gentle and come to me immediately—unless you love your horrid animals more than me! If you do not come I will never, never in my life, give you one single kiss! No, sir! A thousand kisses! But how I detest you!
>
> *Ta aimée,*
>
> LUCILLE.

XXIX

FORTY-EIGHT hours later in the late afternoon the furious drumming, chanting and screaming announced the return of the victorious troops of Zalu Zako. Birnier from his jail on the hill watched the bronze flood pour like a stream of lava out of the plantation and inundate the village, spears flashing silver points in the slanting rays of the sun. But what had happened to zu Pfeiffer and the white sergeants? No sign of them could he see. Waves of sound lapped continuously around the sacred hill. But no one came near.

The long mauve shadow of the hill ate up the village. Fires began to flicker amid the huts and away in the recesses of the plantation. The lowing of cattle added to the general hysterical clamor. As the western sky was still ablaze with incandescent color, stole the cold green of the advancing moon in the east.

"Mungongo, what are thy brethren about to do?"

"It is the Festival of the Harvest, as I have told thee, O Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands."

"But they have not the bride?"

"Nay." Mungongo glanced apprehensively toward the temple where in what was to have been a bathroom was Bakuma hidden.

"He who may-not-be-mentioned demands but blood (a sacrifice). The bride is the food of the wizards. Yet to each warrior is every woman his bride this night."

"Why didst thou not tell me this thing before?" demanded Birnier, who knew that such sacrifice and license was one of the customs of the primitive tribes in all parts of the world and in all ages.

"Thou didst not ask me," retorted Mungongo, to whom the affair was such a matter, of course, that it was not worth mentioning.

The divine king grimly watched his subjects. In the growing light flitted gnomes around the huts in and out the sepia caverns of the plantation. As a banana frond was etched in sepia against the great moon, the ocean of clamor was cleft by the high treble of the tribal troubadour. At the bottom of the wide street appeared madly dancing figures.

As they approached, Birnier could distinguish Bakahenzie, Marufa and Yabolo in the van, dressed in full panoply, whirling and leaping with the untiring energy of hysteria. Behind them shuffled and pranced a vast mass of warriors, behind whom again several hundred women shrilled and wriggled in the mighty chorus. The rhythm of the drums increased to the maddening action impulse of the two short, one long beat.

Pm-pm—Pommmmm! Pm-pm—pmmmmm! Pm-pm—pommmmm!

The treble solo of the chant darted above that throb and orgiastic grunt like a mad bird skimming the turbulent tops of a dark forest.

Pm-pm—pommmmm! Pm-pm—pommmmm! Pm-pm—pommmmm!

The rhythm seemed like a febrile pulse within Birnier's brain, dominating him with hypnotic suggestion to action. The hysterical impulse to scream and to yell, to dance and to leap, plucked at his limbs. Delirious desires woke from he knew not what subconcious caverns, wriggled and struggled furiously within him.

The great moon scattered blue stars upon the spears as if upon the green scales of some leviathan, squirming and wriggling in delirious torment.

Control the twitching of his muscles to that rhythm, Birnier could not. He had to fight to resist the waves of hysteria permeating the air. He glanced at Mungongo. The whites of his eyes were rolling. He closed his eyes, cursing the insistency of the drums and the pneumonic grunts. Forcibly he kept up a running fire of psychological explanations:

"Annihilation of inhibitions—dissociation of personality—triumph of the subconscious animal," as a wizard, muttering incantations against evil spirits.

He felt dizzy.

"God, I'm drunk with rhythm," he exclaimed and opened his eyes.

The wizards were entering the large gate of the outer enclosure. The mass of the people were like black locusts which had settled upon the village and the other hill. The drums ceased. Bakahenzie, Marufa and Yabolo ran straight toward him, screaming harshly. This was the cue.

Birnier walked back slowly. In awful silence they began to push the idol. The wood creaked protestingly. Slowly the mass slid on to Birnier's back. He gripped it and began to walk to the entrance. As he passed Mungongo, the sacred fires shot up a yellow tongue. A sound like a moan rose, dripping with screams. It grew into a continuous thunder of noise. The drums rippled into a furious tattoo. The three wizards dashed before him, prancing high in the air. Birnier shuffled a dozen yards to the left and turned. He stopped.

Upon the ground just within the outer gate, in view of the multitude beyond, ivory in the moonlight was the nude figure of a white man. Above him pranced Bakakenzie, and in his hand gleamed a native knife.

Birnier made a supreme effort to think. The training of his life threw upon the screen of his mind the essential points more rapidly than conscious thought. Bakahenzie, as well as the others, was in an abnormal state of excitement. There was no time to employ "magic" rockets or anything else. He swung the idol upon one shoulder and ran forward. He saw the blue eyes move and the bracelet wink as in the moonlight he stepped over the bound body. He bent, balancing the idol upon his shoulders, and seized zu Pfeiffer by the arm.

The throb of the drums and the roar of the people, who knew not but that this act was in accordance with the rules, continued. The wizards remained motionless, expectant. Bakahenzie stood rigid, as if paralyzed by the unexpected. The knife was a quivering blue snake in his hand.

Half-blinded with sweat, with his muscles cracking, Birnier staggered on with the heavy burden, dragging the nude body after him. Hours seemed to pass, each second of which might bring a spear in his back, before he reached the place of the temple. He slid the idol into the hole and turned.

From the tumult of sound the screech of Bakahenzie shot up like a snipe from a rice field. The other wizards sprang with him. The moonlight kissed a spearhead beside the stone figure of Mungongo by the sacred fires. Birnier leaped, plucked the spear, caught zu Pfeiffer in his arms and with a supreme effort raised the body above his shoulders that all might see.

At the entrance Bakahenzie and the other two were arrested by astonishment. Lowering the body to the base of the idol, which leaned sideways in a drunken leer, Birnier raised the spear on high and brought it down accurately between zu Pfeiffer's left arm and breast, dropped swiftly upon his knees to cover his actions and slashed his own left forearm. Then he sprang to his feet and raised a bloodied spear as he cried aloud—

"The god hath taken his own!"

Bakahenzie was the first to see that the white breast of the victim was indeed deluged in blood; perhaps the veneration engendered by the fingers of Tarum moved beneath the hysterical blood-lust.

"The god hath taken his own!" he repeated in a piercing scream; Marufa echoed the shout. As they turned, the cry was ricocheted beyond the farthest hill.

"The god hath taken his own!"

XXX

THE reflection of a shaft of moonlight through the half-completed thatch upon zu Pfeiffer's "magic" mirror, which the natives had not dared to remove, set afire the sapphires upon his arm as he sat rigidly in a camp-chair in a suit of pajamas. Upon the bed lay Birnier, nursing his bandaged left arm. Now and again the thrumming, chanting and the shrilling of the saturnalia without rose into discordant yells like a gust of wind whipping tree-tops into fury.

Zu Pfeiffer appeared taciturn and suspicious. Perhaps the unexpected loosening of his tautened nerves, strung up to meet a death as his caste demanded that he should, and the confrontation of the object of his violent hate had completely unnerved him. When Birnier had dragged him within and cut his bonds, he had grunted a curt and very official thanks for the rescue and as sullenly hesitated at the offer of the pajamas. But, as if deciding that he could not retain any dignity in his own bloodied skin, he had accepted them as well as a sorely needed drink of water.

The reaction after the crisis of excitement or, more than possibly, the influence of the general hysteria in the air had distorted Birnier's vision of things, for he was very conscious of a neurotic desire to laugh unrestrainedly. Thus it was that for nearly half an hour the two men remained in the gloom of silence.

He was keenly aware, too, of the high nervous tension of his guest, a consideration for which was increased by a psychological comprehension of his state, for Birnier had long ago realized that the only solution of zu Pfeiffer's original crazy statement that he was engaged to the wife of a man to whom he was speaking indicated a form of insanity, a psychosis.

A psychological law is that natural emotions must have an outlet; if they are repressed, they are apt to cause a state of mental disease which in an aggravated form may lead the patient to the asylum but in the incipient stage are as common as jackals in Africa.

Zu Pfeiffer was suffering from such a case of mild psychosis; for, brought up under an iron code to follow a reasoned plan without permitting his emotions to react, the repressed emotions bubbled out in the form of a deification of his Kaiser and the adoration of Lucille; both states were absolutely apart from all reason, indeed approached to a state of dissociation of consciousness.

The desired unattainable is projected into the realm of myth. Such a case is the historic one of the man who, keenly intelligent upon every subject mentioned, startles the visitor by the demand for a piece of toast, gravely explaining that he is a poached egg and that he wishes to sit down, or as Pascal—who ever had beside him the great black dog. To mention or to attempt to reason with such a one was merely to excite the insane part of him.

So it was that Birnier determined to ignore the subject entirely, perfectly aware that the sullenness of the man sitting in the camp-chair opposite to him was caused by an exaggerated terror that he would insist upon speaking of the one subject which should be tabu.

The associative suggestion of Lucille diverted his mind until he became immersed in thoughts of her. A queer vision of a well-fed tiger playing with a kid entered his head. More conscious than ever of her attraction by reason of the intensified sense of her wrought by her letter, he glanced surreptitiously at the rigid form in the chair, and a wave of pity, mixed with a half-conscious pride that she belonged to him, rose within him. Then Birnier started as he was brought back to a realization of the passing of time by a harsh voice that told of strained nerves—

"Herr Professor, what is your pleasure to do with me, if you please?"

"I beg your pardon!" Birnier sat up. "Er— Naturally, I shall endeavor to get you away as early as possible. It would be as well if you took advantage of the present—er—saturnalia to escape. I can not do much. I can provide you with a gun and food. As you are not injured, you ought to be able to get a reasonable distance from here by morning; for the rest, I'm afraid you must fend for yourself. I wish that I could do more, but I'm afraid that my power is not yet sufficient to insure any help from the natives."

An inarticulate sound emerged from zu Pfeiffer's mouth. Birnier's eyes caught the sheen of the photograph upon the wall. Escape! Lucille! Almost involuntarily he stretched out a hand and took Lucille's letter from the table. Again came zu Pfeiffer's voice.

"I thank you, Herr Professor, but I can not accept—for myself!"

Birnier stared at him.

"I wish you to understand that for myself that is impossible."

The tall figure seemed to straighten in the chair.

"But, as I have the honor to serve his Imperial Majesty, I am bound to preserve to the best of my ability my body in order to answer for my culpable negligence which has resulted in the loss of my two companies. Most distinctly, Herr Professor, I wish you to know that I accept your offer in order to place myself before the court martial that awaits me."

Birnier almost gasped. That this anomaly of a man, who was capable of cold-blooded murder at the prompting of an hallucination and who now appeared equally capable of the utter annihilation of self at the service of his Imperial master, meant what he said, Birnier did not doubt. Yet it was not anomalous. Logical, in fact—the capability of supreme sacrifice for either of his idols.

"I understand you, Lieutenant," said he courteously. "I——"

The two letters in his hand crackled. An irresistible impulse urged him. Before he could master the mean desire, he had handed the second letter to zu Pfeiffer with the words—

"Forgive me, I have here a letter which it is my duty to return to you."

THE sapphires winked as zu Pfeiffer held up the letter in the shaft of moonlight. There was a suppressed grunt as of pain. Zu Pfeiffer rose stiffly and walked to the door. His tall figure was silhouetted in profile against the green sky and, as Birnier watched, he saw a gleam as of crystal upon an eyelash. Birnier, ashamed of his sole revenge, turned away.

But as if revenge were recoiling upon him came in the wake of that satisfied primitive instinct a surge of longing for Lucille. Lucille! Lucille! God, how he wanted to see those eyes again! Feel those lips and hear the gurgle of her laughter! Sense the perfume of her hair as she murmured, "*Mon petit loup!*"

Birnier sat holding the letter. He fought with a surging impulse to abandon everything to go to her—if he could get out! How stale and monotonous the adventure and the scientific interest suddenly seemed! After all, what had he accomplished? What could he accomplish? Even yet he had learned but little of the secrets of the witch-doctors' craft. Perhaps there was little or nothing to learn. And zu Pfeiffer?

He glanced. He stared across at the portrait of Lucille. And, as he gazed, a wave of pity rose within him for this boy, made mad by the witchery of those eyes and the music of that voice. A sentence in Lucille's letter appeared to stand out from the context: "*Mon dieu*, they are as thick as the blackberries." He was conscious of a renewed impulse to go to her.

And yet—and—yet . . . Why the devil had she taken it into her head to come out to Uganda above all places?

She was damnably near to him. He smiled satirically as he recollected her phrase about those fools who made of a love a nuisance, and yet now what was she doing? After all, the suspicion in his mind that love is everything to a woman seemed proved true.

But how adorable she was! He fingered the letter as if it were part of her. Well, she was young; success and adulation from one capital to another had interested and amused her for a few years. But when milady suddenly discovers that the career bores her, she throws up everything and, logically to her mind, expects her mate to do likewise.

With what insouciance had she treated the affair of zu Pfeiffer and the youngster whom he had killed. When he had met her, she had had a story of a young fool count in Paris who had shot himself merely because she would not listen to his suit; and she had protested with one of those wonderful shrugs and *moues*, saying that she could not marry all the men in the world. That apparently bloodthirsty indifference had, of course, tended to make more men "crazy wild," as she put it, about her. And that reputation had added to her numerous attractions even to Birnier.

He could escape if he wished—with zu Pfeiffer. He could take Mungongo with him. Yet, would Mongongo dare the tabu for his bidding? Birnier doubted it. They were all dominated by this confounded idol of wood, he reflected. Bakahenzie or even Mungongo would cheerfully sacrifice him if they imagined that the —— Unmentionable One desired it, at the supposititious bidding of something which was nothing.

Through the sweet scent of her in the air like a compelling aura about him came suddenly zu Pfeiffer's voice, speaking in the accents of agony; yet all he said was:

"Herr Professor Bernier, I am compelled—to—to apologize for ——"

The voice failed, and the haughty blond head turned away, unable to complete to the uttermost the greatest sacrifice he had ever attempted.

"Please don't," said Birnier quietly, comprehendingly. "I understand."

And Birnier did comprehend; he realized the small hell in zu Pfeiffer as a higher developed tabu did a childish tabu unto death. Zu Pfeiffer, white man, had been just as guilty in the attempt to commit murder at the supposititious inversion of a thumb of an idol as Bakahenzie—not an idol of wood but the projection of his subconscious desires.

Zu Pfeiffer would sacrifice a million at the bidding of his Kaiser, whose divinity was the same myth, the projection of himself. Yet what had been his object in undertaking all these pains and penalties but to study mankind in the making, the black microcosm of a white macrocosm; to aid them to a better understanding of themselves and each other. Was not Bakahenzie an embryonic zu Pfeiffer? How could one aid a zu Pfeiffer if one did not know a Bakahenzie.

From the saturnalia in progress outside came another swirl of sound, seeming to lap mockingly against the motionless figure of zu Pfeiffer silhouetted against a green sky, cynical and impotent, as above him towered the idol, leaning sidewise.

"As if in drunken laughter of the follies of black and white humanity!" mused Birnier. "Yet what am I about to do? At the crook of a dainty finger am I, too, to bow to an idol? I to pity zu Pfeiffer and these children? Savages! Good God! What am I?"

EPILOGUE

LIKE a topaz set in a jade ring was the City of the Snake, the Place of Kings. The broad street which had been planned by zu Pfeiffer was completed. It was lined on each side by the thatched native huts, flanked by the clutter of the other huts in the native fashion, where small chickens and skinny goats scratched at ease. On the other side of the hill, rusty and covered in dust, still lay the overturned "coughing monster," a constant reminder of the power of the new king-god, Moon-Spirit, the incarnation of the Unmentionable One.

The fields around the village wore a carpet of young corn in which women bent at work with the native hoe, brown gollywog children crowing in their blankets on their mothers' backs. The banana plantation looked fresh and clean, secretively daubed here and there with splashes of dull color of flower and young fruit. Down by the Place of Water young girls and matrons laughed and chattered and splashed. Squatting in the threshold of his hut, Marufa regarded the mud wall of the compound in mystic contemplation.

Mighty happenings had there been in the past six moons. The new king-god, the Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands, had indeed proved himself to be the mightiest of magicians. Had he not imprisoned the demons of the sky—the rockets and fireworks—in a magic box and caused them to dance before him? Could he not at will capture the souls of all men—aye, women, children, goats and fowls, the trees and the huts—and make them to be seen in a magic circle at night! (The cinema outfit.) Was he not a greater magician even than Mzrakombinyana, who had reigned for two hundred moons? Who could withstand him? *Ehh!*

Thus it was that, when the One-not-to-be-mentioned spoke through the "pod of the soul," all must obey him; even Bakahenzie, the son of Maliko. And was it not good to obey him, for did not the breath of Tarum—the rain—descend upon them until the crops laughed in his pleasure? Had not the fame of him traveled abroad so that their enemies trembled at his name?

The people were pleased and murmured not, for had not the Voice bidden them to come even every morning to have their demons driven out by the invincible magic of the One-not-to-be-mentioned? True, the doctors were wroth, but who could withstand him who knew all things? *Ehh!*

Had not the Invincible One eaten up entirely the dread Eyes-in-the-hands, the Son-of-the-earthquake, eaten him and all his demon souls? Were not the magic "eyes" of the fingers and wrist revealed to a shepherd in the forest? And were they not disenchanted and sent out of their country by the Son-of-the-lord-of-many-lands (by mail) lest they do harm to the people?

Again, had not the One-not-to-be-mentioned brought forth her who was lost, her who had broken the magic circle, and made her whole so that she had walked out of the Sacred Place unharmed? *Ehh!* And even had the "pod of the soul" ordained that she become the first wife of the son of Kawa Kendi, Zalu Zako, appointed Chief of Chiefs?

So it was on this sizzling afternoon that the hand drums were throbbing softly in the quarters of Zalu Zako, and the women were preparing the marriage feast for Bakuma, the daughter of Bakala. And up on the sacred hill sat the king-god in the "room of mystery" which looks out toward the distant Gambellagalla. An unfinished letter lay upon the table before him. He glanced up at the portrait of Lucille and, smiling, resumed:

Yes, I will tell you again, well beloved, that I love you more than ever for your patient understanding. I will endeavor to appoint a Lord High Postmaster-General as early as possible to expedite the service so that letters do not take longer than ten days each way! But, anyway, that need not worry us, for I have at last been able to arrange that the king take a vacation! By divine right, for as they have so kindly insisted that my alter ego is a lion—because a lion killed zu Pfeiffer, you know, and I am supposed to have eaten him; you have no idea how indigestible that young man was—I am permitted to wander around in that guise unseen to mortal eyes. And I guess I'll be wandering straight to Entebbe! I am very grateful to the three musketeers for entertaining you these long months. No, I am not ridiculous any more, sweet! Not a bit jealous! I know you still call them my "superstitious animals," but remember that it is only by understanding the superstitions of others that one can begin to understand one's own. That's what I came here for, you know. Now about the Paris trip. Yes, we most certainly will—and make of it a second honeymoon.

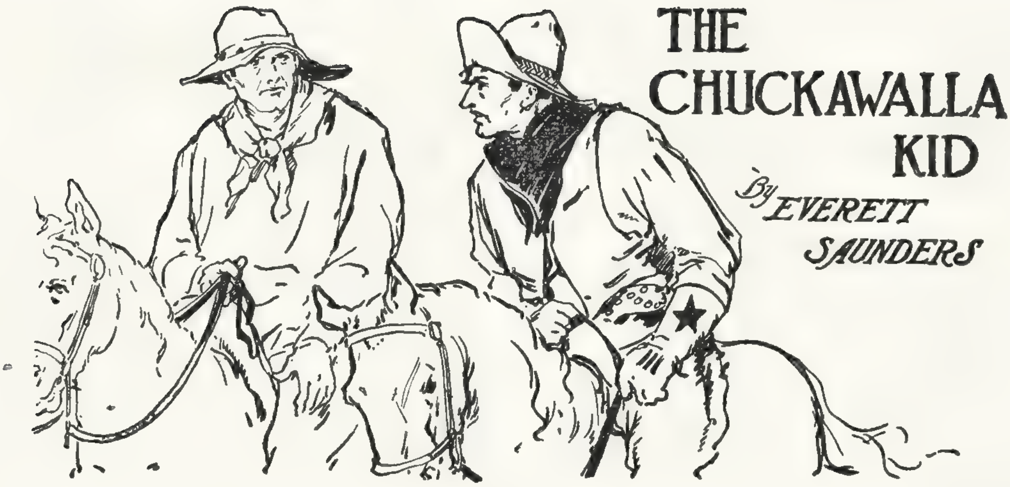
THE END

PRAYER FOR A PRODIGAL

by GEORGE CATLIN

JESUS, gentle Son of Mary,
Jesus, hear a mother's plea:
Guide my boy in all his wanderings,
Keep him strong and clean for me.

Jesus Savior, Son of Mary,
Master Thou of winds and sea:
Guide my boy in pathways holy,
Guide him home at last to me.



THE CHUCKAWALLA KID

By EVERETT SAUNDERS

Author of "The Silver Saddle"

THERE were twelve men in the room. Five of them were keenly intent on a poker game. Six of them looked over the shoulders of the players with but little less interest than the players themselves. One of them sat far back in a corner, his chair tilted against the wall, his feet elevated to the top of a dead heating-stove, smoking drowsily.

The Chuckawalla Kid had dealt a hand, and there had been heavy betting—heavy, that is, in proportion to the money in sight. Paul Burke had "seen" the Kid's last raise; and then had come that moment of gripping tenseness before the revelation of the cards.

The Kid laid down his cards, face up, glanced carelessly at those of his opponent, put out a slim hand and pulled the mass of chips, coins, and low-denomination bills toward his own stack, which was already disproportionately large.

Paul Burke rose slowly to his feet. He spread his two hands flat on the board and leaned far forward, his eyes boring into the Kid's face.

"I ain't whinin' about what I've lost," he began slowly, biting out his words, "but I seen you flip out that bottom card. I wasn't sure before, but now I am. So I'm goin' to tell you something about yourself."

"You needn't go to any trouble on my account," the Kid said insolently. "I know more about myself than you do. Besides, if you say I didn't deal those cards off one after the other just the way they came, you're a ——"

His ferret eyes swept the table. In the circle of faces he found only unqualified hostility. He did not finish the statement.

"I'm a—what?" Burke asked with deadly quietness.

"Aw, cut out your meowing and play cards." The Kid made an attempt at jocularity. "You're not used to playing in games where everybody won, are you?"

"Now you'll listen to what I'm goin' to tell you," Burke said. "If you stop me, you'll have to use something heavier than words. I don't know who named you, but I do know you're —— well named. A man that'll deal off the bottom of the deck in a little game in a ranch bunk-house is a lizard, whether he looks like one or not. But you look like one—you've got the eyes of a lizard. On top of that you've got the manners of a lizard. Chuckawalla fits you because you're a harmless lizard, just fast an' silent, ugly an' harmless. Rattlesnake would be a good name for you, only a rattlesnake will fight. Besides, he's a gentleman alongside of you. He don't cheat—an' he shakes a noisy tail before he strikes."

To the surprize of the men at the table, the Kid received this castigation in silence. Even when Burke paused significantly at the end, he made no answer either by word or action, though it was palpable that Burke by his fighting words had expected to get a rise.

The Kid's half-nervous, half-deliberate

manner did not perceptibly change, and the expression in his darting black eyes remained the same. He had that rare feature called a good poker face. He never betrayed a "hand" in a card game. Nor did he betray the fact that the right hand—which on occasion demonstrated itself to be a lightning gun-hand—fingering the chips on the table with seeming carelessness, was in reality twitching with the impulse to murder.

Burke had expected an answer. Receiving none, he snorted contemptuously and opened his mouth to let loose further and more withering denunciations.

It was Fred Farren, the ranch foreman, who first correctly interpreted the warning in the Kid's manner. It wasn't fear that had prevented a gun-play. It was the dictation of judgment. It were madness to go for a gun with the crowd unanimously against him. But there was a subtle betrayal in the way the Kid's eyes flashed toward the door as if planning a way of escape.

"Now—" Burke was beginning again when Farren laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It's worth a few dollars just to find a man out, Paul," he said. "His time will be ready for him in the morning. There's no use bawlin' him out, anyhow. He ain't got a friend in the house."

Two heavy feet clumped on the floor. Eyes turned toward the corner where Dick Wilkins, the queer, simple-minded fellow who was the Kid's incongruous pal, had been sitting.

"I reckon the Kid's got one friend," he drawled in his slow and heavy way. "If you're payin' him off, you might as well make 'er out for me, too."

There was a moment of surprized silence at the temerity, the moral courage, to face the unanimity of hostility in that angry crowd. Fred Farren drew Wilkins aside.

"If you want your check, Dick, of course it's up to you," he said kindly. "But take my advice and ditch that guy *pronto*, right now. He's no good. He'll get you in trouble some time good an' plenty. He's that kind."

Dick grinned in his sheepish way and shifted his feet with embarrassment.

"I reckon I'll stick with him," he said. "The Kid's always treated me purty white."

The singular pair had come riding to the ranch two weeks back, riding from nowhere. The men had quickly remarked the curious attachment that bound the two. The one was slim and quick, with a thin face, eyes beady-black—small, and too close-set for comfort—and a thin, cruel line of mouth. The other was larger, more gross in physical structure, less efficient. And his face was broad, honest and dull. They had quickly seen how Wilkins' eyes constantly followed the Kid, like a dog's.

Shortly after sunrise the next morning the two were mounted, ready to take the trail. The Chuckawalla Kid unlatched and kicked open the swinging gate with a spurred boot and rode out into the wire-fenced lane. Close behind him rode Dick Wilkins, whose little bay horse twisted his body and squirmed like an eel to win through the narrowing opening and avoid the gate as it came swinging shut.

"So long, Dick, an' good luck," Fred Farren called clearly from the other side of the corral. "If you ever ride this way again in different company, remember you're always welcome."

AS THEY rode away, the Kid's mind was bent upon things other than the mere lack of expressions of friendship at the parting. And the Kid's mind was not troubled by the knowledge that under him and to the right of him were the only two friends he possessed. Graybird, his horse, would come at his call. Dick Wilkins would follow him to the frazzled edge of things. It mattered not to him that Dick was an exception to the whole world of men. As soon as they were out of ear-shot of the group in the corral, he turned wickedly upon him.

"There's one thing I want to get into you," the Kid said, "and that is: you've got to quit spilling all the information you've got to every Tom, Dick and Harry as to who we are and where we're from. You've been doing that ever since I picked you up at Elko. You've blazed a trail of information so plain that the bummest gumshoe alive could follow it with his eyes shut. Now get this once and for all: if you can't learn to keep your tongue between your teeth, I'm —— well and good through with you."

Dick looked at him with wordless sorrow, mutely eloquent, like a reproved dog.

"You know I didn't figger on doin'

nothin' out of the way, Kid," he protested. "Once in a while a guy asks me where I'm from. Well, I can't pertend like I'm deef an' dumb, can I?"

"Holy ——!" the Kid exploded. "Can't you say Tucson or San Diego just as easy as you can say Elko or Winnemucca or Gold Circle? You'd better, or——"

He left the alternative unspoken for emphasis.

"Here, roll a smoke," Dick proposed placatingly. "Toosawn goes—also, Sandy Ago. But I'll sure be up against it if I spring that on somebody that's really been there. I don't know the name of even one saloon or feed-barn."

The Kid looked at him witheringly out of his close-set, bead-black eyes.

"You poor fish, I guess you'll never know anything. Don't you know that you can go from Chilpancingo to Dawson and from Portland to Portland, forever riding to the next ridge to lamp the next town, and all you'll ever see are the same —— old people and the same —— old towns? Tucson is on the Arizona desert and San Diego is close to the ocean, three or four hundred miles south of 'Frisco. That's all you need to know. Men get drunk, gamble, lie and steal in one the same as in another. As for names, names are nothing. There are Smiths and Joneses in every burg the size of your hat."

Dick looked across the narrow gulf between the bay horse and the gray, and in his big, childlike eyes showed the boundless admiration that was the fiber of the bond between the two. Whereas Dick was congenitally honest and slow to think, the Kid was unscrupulous, quick and clever. That cleverness and self-reliance had won the allegiance of Dick. And the Kid, despite his manifold bad traits, had managed to hold that allegiance by fending in divers ways for him. Wilkins, dull and slow, had always been the butt of jokes. The Kid, in whose perverted soul lightness was replaced by cynicism and misanthropy, never played jokes upon him. Sometimes, he abused him with words, but Dick always accepted the abuse gratefully as the welcome, if painful, inception of wisdom.

Moreover, the Kid softened the trails by his keen generalship. Dick always tried to follow his directions implicitly, because, while often they entailed heavy work, they generally guided him past the thorniest mistakes. The Kid it was who dealt the crooked cards and took the chances of sudden and violent death. He paid the bills in time of famine, and he even split winnings.

"He's always treated me purty white," was Dick's way of putting it.

The Kid tolerated his companion because, out of the whole world of men, Dick was the only one who had freely and for long blessed him with a real friendship. It is sometimes most convenient to have a friend. It is always pleasant, even to a misanthrope whose wizened soul is stamped to the core with degeneracy, to ride the lonely trails of life with one not filled to the lips with hate.

The two had led a varied life together. They had been a unique pair of friends. The Kid did the work where a head was required. Dick did the work where a pair of tough and willing hands were needed. It was through the operations the Kid planned and one or the other, or both of them, executed, that they lost standing wherever they went.

After leaving the Warm Spring ranch, they drifted leisurely for many days. They dropped in and out of places and went on, looking for the hazy Eldorado which has never been found, where work is light, money free and plentiful and where men always successfully resist the impulse to shoot when too flagrantly cheated in a game. They had put a long trail behind them before they rode one morning to the brink of a hill overlooking a mountain-walled valley in the center of which lay a prosperous town. The Kid knew something of the place; he knew roughly the extent of traffic of the town, which was the center of a wide, thinly settled territory rich in mining and cattle industries.

Dick looked to his companion for a hint of the course they were to follow. He saw the Kid's eyes shining with an unholy light.

"What's up, Chuck?" asked Dick.

The Kid was silent for a space. Then he turned upon Wilkins with the unnatural calm upon him which presaged his most inordinate perpetrations.

"I'll tell you what's up," he said. "I'm—we're going to feather our nest once and for all. No more of this petit larceny, bottom-card stuff for me—us. Do you see that town? There's a bank down there.

We are going down there, walk in, and rake all the paper money they've got into a sack. We won't take much gold, because gold weighs five pounds to the thousand. Then we're going to ride out. That's the only way to make a go of anything—show some guts, like the Dalton and James boys did. Go sneaking around at night and you're rapped on the head like a rat. Fly in broad daylight and high like a hawk and you're safe. On Graybird and Redboy we can run down anything they've got if they'll just let us out of easy range to start."

They rode down to the bank. They went in the clear light of day. They did what no sane or sober men, be they ever so lustful for gold or the things of life gold buys, would ever dream of doing. And they won.

They dropped the reins of their horses just across the street from the bank, and the gray horse and the bay stood there among the many horses of the ranchers who filled the town. They walked across the street, studiously ordinary in manner.

Just as they entered the door, they raised bandanna handkerchiefs that had been knotted carelessly around their necks and covered half their faces. Then they pulled their guns. The Kid pushed shut the open door of the bank and drew down the blinds.

Thirty seconds later all except one of the employees and customers of the bank stood in a row facing Dick's revolver and reaching for the ceiling. The Kid and the cashier were in the vault. At the end of three more minutes the two were backing toward the door, and the bank employees all in a row were still facing the guns and reaching ceilingward.

They opened the door, backed out and once on the street ran swiftly across to their horses. People turned to look at them, first with curiosity, then with consternation as bedlam broke loose in the despoiled bank.

THEY leaped into their saddles and tore down a cross-street that showed the bordering hills at the open end. Hastily deputized men appropriated convenient animals. Soon the hard street was thundering with galloping horses.

In that race of life and death the gray horse and the bay ran neck and neck. The two riders sat lightly, skilfully, in their saddles, balancing the flying horses on taut, reins. Guns barked faintly behind them, and occasional bullets whined past.

"Don't pay any attention to them," the Kid told his companion. "We can outrun and outwind nine horses out of ten. If the tenth horse is in that bunch back there, I'll shoot the daylight out of him after he's run off from the rest."

But the tenth horse wasn't in that bunch. No horse who ran that day was even approximately the equal of the gray or the bay. In that first wild dash across the level floor of the valley they gained swiftly upon their pursuers. The barking of guns grew fainter and ceased, as did the menace of the whining splinters of lead. When they reached the edge of the valley and turned into the mouth of one of the rugged cañons opening back into the mountains, their pursuers were a dim, straggling group far out upon the plain.

Then the killing violence of their pace was slackened, but they went on and on. They rode far up the cañon. They crossed a low divide and dropped down into another watershed.

Twenty miles from the town they were riding across the widened-out bed of a gulch that in early days had been torn into deep holes and hummocks by miners digging for placer-gold on bed-rock. It was there the accident happened.

They were going at a quick trot among the pitfalls and obstructions. The horses, tiring, had not the quickness and surety of foot they possessed when fresh. The bay horse, stepping on a rolling stone, stumbled so violently that only by exerting all his strength on the reins was Dick able to save him from falling. When the horse started again, he carried a front foot, swinging along with slow, awkward half-leaps, as one trammeled with hopples.

Dick stopped him close to an old square-timbered shaft and swung to the ground, He quickly examined the injured foot. The horse had pulled a shoe and badly sprained an ankle.

Dick looked up, dismay in his simple face. The Kid was riding slowly back.

"What's up?" Chuckawalla called.

"Ankle sprained," Dick said. "Guess I'll have to hoof it the rest of the way." He was silent a moment; then he put the problem of procedure to the master mind. "How do you think we'd better work it now?"

The Kid's narrow eyes did not change, but in the perverted brain back of them thoughts raced through the shuttles of his mind and swiftly wove a plan.

"Pull your saddle and bridle," he ordered, "and chuck them into that bush over there—hide 'em pretty good."

Dick did so, working swiftly and anxiously. When he came back, the Kid had dismounted and was pacing slowly, apparently deep in thought. His eyes were on the ground, shadowed by the brim of his hat. He did not raise them until a few quick steps had put Dick's back toward him. Then he raised his face. His right hand flashed upward with his revolver spitting fire.

The Chuckawalla Kid stood for a moment looking down into the black depths of the shaft after the sound of gravel, shaken from the rotten walls and rained downward, had died away. He examined the plan to which he had entrusted his precious life for possible faults and found none.

"They'll find the crippled horse and the saddle, and then they'll take it that both of us rode away on one horse. And then they'll try to overtake the overloaded horse in one quick burst of speed—which they won't.

"He was enough of a dead weight to carry in ordinary times," he condescended to tell his wanton conscience, "let alone without a horse—and with a life term in the pen hanging on a slip of his boob tongue, even if we got away."

He felt of the sack in which were the "feathers for his nest," and a thrill ran from his finger-tips at the contact. In that sack was the equivalent of land and cattle, or lights, music and the freedom of towns. And now he was under no obligation to give half of it away.

The gray horse, at a long, swinging trot, powerful despite his growing weariness, began putting the miles between him and the scene of the atrocity.

The Chuckawalla Kid rode far. He crossed the invisible line between two States. He kept to wild, uninhabited places, making it a rule to avoid meetings at all costs. At the close of a certain day he neared the end of his journey. He had come to a wild, rugged hollow among mountains. The bed was strewn with flinty boulders that had crashed down from the steep walls. Long fans of shell-rock sloped upward precariously from the border of the valley. It was a barren, forbidding place, lonesome with the cries of wild animals.

When he rode into the place, the usually light-footed Graybird was clumsy from the the excessive labor of the days just past. But the master, who had been carried to safety on the slave's expenditure of toil, was little the worse for wear.

He unfastened the cinch and drew the saddle away. The blanket was wet with the sweat of the horse. He carried the accouterments to the edge of the hollow, where a shell-rock slide came down. He quickly tossed aside a few of the loose stones, dropped the saddle into the shallow excavation, and covered it.

Coyotes, near at hand and all around, were howling, their keen voices piercing space like arrows.

He went back to the jaded horse, who was browsing on the bunch-grass between the boulders. The Kid's narrow eyes expressed no sentiment as he looked at him.

"Those hungry brutes will soon make a gray horse look like any other kind of a horse," he said aloud. "Then there will be no clues. The robbers rode a gray horse and a bay. The bay horse was found crippled on the trail. The gray never showed up. They won't find Dick to identify him; so they'll never get a line on me."

Graybird raised his head and looked at the Kid while he ground a mouthful of luxuriant grass between his strong jaws. He flicked his ears contentedly and with his eyes seemed to offer thanks for the respite.

Chuckawalla drew and fired from the hip, and the horse, knocked dead on his feet, sank with a heavy groan. The roar of the gun echoed around the barren valley, filling the spaces left vacant by the hushing of the coyotes' yells.

THE Kid had no way of knowing how far the snares of vengeance had been laid. If any suspicion was to be attached to him, he didn't want the irrefragable evidence of fifty thousand dollars in paper money on his person. Therefore, he hid the money safely in a little cave on the side of the mountain before he went down to a small city that lay not many miles beyond.

He attracted no more than passing interest there. The waves of excitement attendant on the robbery had eddied but faintly at that distance. Chuckawalla had covered his trail well, putting a wide gap between the unknown robbers of the bank and the young man who entered the distant town without ostentation. So he adorned himself in the raiment of prosperity and prepared to enter upon the rôle of the citizen from Tucson, Arizona, who had come to invest in a ranch.

Three weeks from the day of his arrival he mounted a horse and rode by a circuitous route back among the bordering hills, watching closely to make sure that he was unobserved, and came near nightfall to the barren little valley.

He rode to where the gray horse had fallen and looked down meditatively upon the unrecognizable remnants. Coyotes had torn all the meat from the bones. Some of the bones had been pulled joint from joint and now lay scattered for a space among the boulders. The strong ribs that had curved protectingly over the great lungs and kingly heart of the horse were intact, only now they curved over nothingness. He saw only a bare, disintegrating frame.

The Kid rode to the abrupt wall of the mountain, dismounted, climbed for a space and easily found the precious packet. He unwrapped it to make sure his wealth was not a wild dream. When he felt the great sheaf of crisp bank-notes between his fingers, exultation seized him. He stowed the money away inside his clothes and rode back to the white skeleton of the friend he had betrayed. A weird whim, born of the Mammon-intoxication in his brain, was guiding him.

Dismounting, he set a spurred boot upon the curving barrier of ribs and addressed to the silent valley his great resolve:

"I've just finished playing a winning streak against heavy odds, and I've played the stiff game of life too long not to know that a winning streak is bound to break. Everything has fallen in my favor. Now I'm through with crooked work for good, because nobody knows better than I that you can't ride your luck forever."

A pain, sudden, unheralded, paralyzing in its intensity, smote him at the knee. Instinctively he recoiled, leaping backward. As he moved, he dragged from the skeleton, where the heart of the horse had beat, the wriggling body of a huge rattler that hung by the two barb-like fangs in the cloth of his tight riding-breeches. The snake fell free and instantly writhed itself into a knot. Then—and not till then—its vibrating tail sent forth the dry, harsh buzz in which immaterial sound becomes a material thing compounded of malignancy, poison and the threat of death.

For a moment he stood unnerved, his body racked by the dreadful pain. The coincidental nature of the accident, startling as it would have been in any case, fastened itself upon his imagination. A reasonless panic was shaking him. Even to his coldly skeptical mind it seemed like a judgment of God.

Then reason asserted itself. With trembling hands he began unfastening his clothes to bare the leg. And he fumbled in his haste. The sight of the wound gave him a shock. There were the two tiny fang marks like pin-pricks, and directly under them lay a distended vein. Already the flesh was puffing and changing color. As he looked, he saw and felt the core of swelling rising with sensible speed.

He produced a penknife and slashed at the wound. A little blood, dark and turbid, flowed out. Then, remembering something he had once read, he knotted his handkerchief around the limb for a ligature, twisting it with a stick. Again he sought to open the wound with his knife.

A feeling that was not a sensation, but a dreadful premonition, swept him and passed. It was intangible, a nameless nightmarish horror, as if the hand of Death had been laid upon him. He knew that the poison had been carried along the vein to his heart before the application of the bandage. His eyes, wide with a fear such as he had never felt before, fell upon the snake. All his fear changed to wild anger. He screamed inarticulate curses.

"You struck without warning, —— you!" he cried as to an intelligent enemy.

Stooping, he lifted a heavy stone to hurl upon the reptile and saw it crawl from view among the bones.

Then desire for revenge was blotted out by the return of the nameless foreboding. But this time it took form. A nausea came, possessed him and grew momentarily.

Cold sweat broke out upon his body. An unbearable depression weighed upon him. However, when the fear again assailed him, he commanded himself by a supreme effort.

"——!" he said aloud with a trace of his old cynicism. "A man don't die in twenty minutes of snake-bite. It's me for the town, a few shots of booze and a little talk with the doctor.

"What's the matter with me, anyhow?" he asked himself after a moment. "It's hitting me like a dose of rot-gut would a baby."

Mastering the growing nausea, he tightened the bandage on his swollen leg, moistened a handful of tobacco with saliva and plastered it upon the wound. Quickly he refastened his clothes and turned toward the hired horse, his wounded leg dragging heavily, as if set in a cast of lead.

But the horse, frightened by the man's outburst, had moved away, trailing the reins. The Kid called to him to stop, but the strange voice carried little authority and awoke no affection. The horse, sensing freedom from punishment for his insubordination, feeling no love for the man, but only instinctively understanding the fear under which he labored, quickened his pace. The Kid strove futilely to run and savagely cursed his impotency. Finally stopping, he deliberately slashed open the leg of his trousers, found the ligature, now almost buried in the strutted flesh, and cut it away. But this did not serve to quicken the deadened nerves and muscles. The sickness and depression were increasing, and the numbness that preceded the swelling was creeping over his whole body. Finally the severest effort of will could not maintain him in a sense of reality.

The horse moving before him, head turned to the side to keep the trailing reins from under his feet, wavered, now near, now at an infinite distance. His pursuit came to be not a labor impelled by a dire necessity but a crusade imposed by a burdensome and outlandish sense of duty.

And in that moment the Chuckawalla Kid lost his cynical self-sufficiency and independence. He relinquished the futile pursuit, staggered to a boulder and sat upon it. His wavering eyes found the horse.

"Come, Graybird," he called once, and the effort was only accomplished by a summoning of all his strength.

In the next moment his mood changed with a thought. A dim wonder was his. He said slowly, struggling with an idea too heavy for his dazed mind—

"It—struck—without—warning."

RIVER LAUGHTER *A complete Novelette*

BY Raymond S. Spears

Author of "The Wandering Son," "The Diversion of a Monographic Professor," etc.

THE Turtles were a select crew of Mississippi River pirates. They knew the river so well that it was an instinct—so well that they could go straight across it in a fog, rowing a skiff. They waited in Tupelo Bend, above Mendova, for a favorable night to ply their occupation of loot, and, when at last a gray mist rose thickly from the surface of the water and drifted out over the sand-bars and eddied through the longshore trees, they dropped down.

They landed on the sand-bar at the upper end of Mendova wharf and tied their shanty-boat to stakes already there. They walked fifty yards across the sand to the cobbled wharf, which had been masked by the bar, and climbed to the level of Front Street. They walked across the brick paving, and there a gloomy figure emerged from the wall and whispered:

"All hunky! Get busy!"

Four men entered the little recess in the wall of the building, which was between two plate-glass windows; they did something to the double door, and it opened before them. They entered the famous "Duck and Deer" store, and one sweep of the flash disclosed the fact that it contained goods to please their fancy. They wasted no time on imagination, however; they set to work.

They dumped boxes of ammunition into bags; they caught up and tied rifles and shotguns into rolls; they filled a big tub with jack-knives and other cutlery—with flashlights, compasses, fishing-tackle and other sporting-goods-store material—and scurried across the street, down the wharf and over the sand-bar to the shanty-boat moored in the gray gloom.

They returned to the store, gathered another load and hurried to the boat with it; and, as they worked separately, they were coming or going—all four of them, for half a dozen trips. No mere minute of business satisfied them. They dealt in no diamonds, pearls or cash affair; they were low-grade workers, but they made up in quantity what they failed to get in quality or price. Many and many a dip, post-office yegg, jewelry-case trader and the like might well envy their average winnings in the precarious game they played. They specialized in method, but not in loot. This happened to be a sporting-goods-store proposition; once they had handled, or turned over, the contents of a grocery store; another time they had taken a dry-goods store; they recalled with evil glee a pawnbroker's establishment and a fur-buyer whom they had easily raided.

The Ohio River knew their work by evidence only; in St. Louis they had a reputation not attached to names; they had even worked in New Orleans, and Kansas City and St. Paul; they were thorough, competent and of great discretion. All they wanted was a dull, foggy night, a beat seldom patrolled by police, a store of some kind and a line of disappearance. They were pirates, but they did not disdain the assistance of motor truck or flat car or even a purloined team of mules and truck.

So now they operated with the skill of experience, the daring of many escapes and the carelessness of those whom the Mississippi has long favored or played with. To their minds, Old Mississip' was sure their good old granddaddy, and they knew him, and he knew them, and the understanding was mutual. At the same time, it is possible that one should not be too sure that he knows the silent, swinging torrent whose moods are full of many seemings.

Little remained in the sporting-goods store when they returned at last, all together, to get the safe. It wasn't a very large safe; one of the four had given it a tentative lift with his hand and was surprized to discover that he could raise a corner. Accordingly, they all returned, caught their fists under the steel box and walked away with it.

They stopped to close and lock the door, too, and, when they went down the levee, they were conscious of the fact that, when the policeman came along on his beat, he would see nothing wrong in the store, except that the electric light had burned out.

The sand was loose on the bar, and that made lugging the safe a hard proposition. They grunted as they stumbled and staggered along—the involuntary grunts of men heavily burdened. A little noise did not alarm them, nor would it alarm any one. The banks of the Mississippi are strangely silent at times and curiously noisy at other times. No one pays much attention to minor sounds.

They had a plain path to follow across the bar. Their four pairs of feet had trampled a trail which they could follow with their toes had their black-night instincts failed them. They arrived at the edge of the bar and lowered the safe to the place where the boat's bow had been.

"Where t'—— 's that shanty-boat?" one choked. "I cayn't feel hit!"

"Ner I!" another gasped for breath.

Their feet were in the water, where they had bumped into the nine-foot-wide bow of their shanty-boat on every previous trip. They lowered the safe and scurried up or down the water's edge. They returned and, hearing one another's footsteps, stopped together.

"Hit's gone!" one whispered fiercely. "Who d'——"

"Some sucker's——"

"Who's done us?"

There was no answer from the four pirates. From out in the fog, however, apparently close at hand—but it was fog—returned a laugh. It was a low, vibrating, merry, chuckling laugh.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha!" in short, light expirations.

It seemed low, but the faces of the buildings along River Street, Mendova, returned the laugh in an echo as loud but breaking.

A minute later they heard another burst of laughter, further away, but carried with the uncanny distinctness which is the property of some kinds of fog. They stood there paralyzed by their disaster and heard the laugh again away down the bend.

"The dad-blasted, no-'count, son of a sneakin' thief!" one of the four on the sand-bar cursed deeply.

Another wailed at the bottom of his breath:

"He hadn't no right to take that bo't! What'd he rob us fer? Why didn't he go up the bank an' steal——"

"An' we doned all the work!" a third whined.

"An' then he laughed at us!" the fourth one gritted his teeth.

They stood there, cursing and growling. Then, suddenly, away down River Street they heard a footfall, followed by another one and another, as some heavy-heeler came pounding along. He kept coming up and up the street, hitting concrete, slab-stone and brick, according to the walks in front of the buildings. They heard him thump upon a plank, and it squeaked a little, not having as yet become damped by the fog. They heard him stop at the corner and drop a locust stick on the curb.

Away up town, three blocks up the hill, they heard the echo answer; then the cop continued his peregrination along the next block and into the one which they had entered to loot. They listened as the cop walked along. Then they heard him stop. The silence was pathetic. It was full of loneliness. Long arms reached out through it; horrors crawled along under the dark. And several sets of teeth chattered and clicked out there on the sand-bar.

The long, rising, screaming shrill of a policeman's whistle shot through the fog like a bullet—or explosion—with the sting of a freezing gale.

"Fo' Gawsake!" one whispered. "For Gawsake!"

He repeated it over and over again in a trembling whisper, unconscious of the fact that he was saying anything and not merely thinking or feeling it. They heard, away up yonder, the pound of heavy feet; they heard the running roll of a big cop coming down the grade, dragging his bounding locust on the pavement to let his partner know he was coming. Then there were two revolver shots. The four men down on the bar saw the faint flashes in the cloud like reflected lightning, and they knew that the bull on the beat had discovered the raid.

"You —— fool!" a voice hissed. "Yo' was smokin' a cig', an' I seen yo' drap hit—an' hit ain' went out yet—an' they knows—they knows we ain' be'n gone long! What'll we do? They'll throw circles—thisaway fustest!"

Away up yonder they heard a sharp musical ringing, and they needed no information as to what that meant. It was the bull cart, big, red and gold bus with the headquarters reserves in it—word had been sent from some corner that there was shooting down on River Street and whistling.

The pirates whispered together. One was for going down the bar. Another preferred up the bar, and a third was for running up into the town, scattering and hiding wherever they could find a hole.

"Stand still, boys," one warned them. "The bull up the slough beat's on, and the one down to the bridge is on—probably been asleep down theh—an'—they'd nab us! They ain' never seen us—but we ain' no angels to look at, boys; we's riveh-rats, an' we look hit! We ain' no friends to count on—we'll jes' do like we done befo'; come on, boys!"

They felt, rather than saw or heard, him turn from the anxious staring toward that blank gray wall of ominous sounds. They did hear his light step into the water. They knew that he was wading in, and they followed him. It was Autumn water, out of the cold and bitter North. Nevertheless, swimming was better than languishing through a third degree.

Silently they took to the water, and, with strokes like muskrats or frogs, they entered the river. As they floated up into the eddy, they heard some one crossing the bar and heard him call:

"This is the way they went!" And, as they felt the current eddy, they heard, "Hey—here's the safe!"

With that, they took the main current and, like ducks, swam away out of danger.

CHAPTER II

COLUMBIANA IS MILDLY ANNOYED

COLUMBIANA MUSCATINE O'BINE dropped down the Ohio in a little white cabin-boat with a red hull; she had a twenty-foot gasoline-launch beside her boat, covered with a half-cabin on the bow and a canvas over the engine-pit to prevent rains from sinking it. A pair of long, light sweeps on the twenty-four-foot flatboat saved gasoline in making landings and showed river-wisdom as well as river-thrift.

As she floated down the edge of Putney Bend eddy, where several boats were tied in, her gaze discovered a number of children and a man of perhaps thirty years playing down on the sand-bar. He was an agile, square-shouldered man, tanned by sun and wind, smooth-shaven and with the smooth action of what is called a "city man" down the river. His glance was quick and keen, and he amused the youngsters and enjoyed himself on the firm, floor-like sand.

With the snag roots and limbs for safeties, the children and man were playing Puss in the Corner; men and women in the other shanty-boats regarded the adult among the children with amusement a little tinged with contempt.

The man was oblivious, however, till the voice of Columbiana crossed the eddy in a sharp hail—

"Don't teach them Puss in the Corner!"

"Why not?" the man demanded resentfully, gazing at her through horn-bow spectacles with wide eyes.

"Because Puss in the Corner is just getting there first and grabbing safety from the others. Teach them Prisoner's Base. Prisoner's Base teaches sacrifice, heroism and rescuing at personal risk! Can't you see?"

The man gazed at the young woman with scowling expression and puzzled eyes. A number of the adult spectators chuckled. The children looked from one to the other, wondering. The game stopped while the shanty-boat went drifting on down, and the woman pulled clear of the shoal and began to make the crossing below.

"That's right, kids!" the man said at last. "I hadn't thought of that; we'll play Prisoner's Base!"

"I never played hit!" one of the children wailed. "I wanta——"

"I'll show you how," the man declared. "First, we must find two long lines—there! That pole-sycamore snag's good for one base, and I'll draw a line between that ship timber and the broken barrel for the other base. Now we'll line up; I choose Timmy. Who do you choose, Myra?"

So they began to play Prisoner's Base, with its racing, romping and daring rescues of caught companions. But there was an odd number, and so the man was referee and told them how. When they were engrossed in playing and had caught the idea, he turned and looked away down the crossing—where a glimmer and a reflection of the sunshine on a cabin-boat window cast darts of light over the river surface and showed whither the young woman was traveling.

When it was time for supper, the children were called to the boat, and they were happy, laughing and full of the delight they had had, playing with the big man, whose name was Caroost. Mrs. Cramell called the big man in to supper with her and her little girl and her own man, for she was grateful to have him so friendly to the little ones, teaching them games that were good to play.

At the table the big man was silent and even diffident. His smooth-shaven face, his bright, blue eyes and his quick smile were attractive, especially to children, whom he seemed to understand better than grown folks. They got nothing from him at the table, not even whether he was out of the Ohio or the Upper Mississippi. Clean, mannerly and a listener; Mrs. Cramell liked him better than ever, for he made talking so easy for her—and she had so much to say!

After supper he took down Cramell's banjo and began to pick it to the immense delight of the little girl, not to mention

Cramell and Mrs. Cramell, who loved music. He played fast music and slow, loud music and soft, good dance-tunes and sweet things to think by. When he went out on the gangplank, he tiptoed so as not to wake the little girl up, and he did not light the lamp on his own cabin-boat. He made it easy for the Cramells to sleep that night.

CAROOST put together all the gossip he had heard down the Ohio and Mississippi, but there was nothing in it for him so far as he could tell. Apparently, Mr. Barklow Waldin had been swallowed up by the Mississippi; at the same time, duty is duty!

He looked from the deck of his red shanty-boat out across the river and recognized it as one of the interesting moments of his life. Adventure had come to him in satisfactory frequency. This was another adventure, hunting for a lost human straw in ten thousand miles of navigable waters and fifty thousand miles of canoe waters—*Kismet*—*Selah*—so be it! In the years since Prof. Barklow Waldin had dropped out of sight, he might have disintegrated and flowed into the Gulf, or he might have moved up the bank somewhere and become respectable, or he might, on a one-hundred-to-one bet, still be on the Mississippi. But shanty-boaters, knowing everybody in a way, had never heard of him that they knew.

James M. Caroost just loved the idea of having been adventurous, although in the critical moment of superlative incident he might endure rather more than he enjoyed. At the same time nervous anticipation never prevented him from having jubilant retrospection. He had what he fondly called a dual personality.

He sat for an hour on the stern-deck of his boat, looking down the Mississippi in the dark night. Away down the bend a Government light wavered and flickered, looking him in the eyes with a challenge. He accepted it. He went ashore and cast off his bow-line. He pulled in his stern-line rapidly and thus backed his boat out into the eddy current. He floated noiselessly up the eddy, around into the main current and down the crossing, pulling a pair of sweeps that carried his boat into the channel.

He sat in the comfortable wicker chair, but not at his ease. At intervals he groaned; then he cursed under his breath; once he said:

"I can't learn from my own heart! Somebody else always has to tell me!"

He made his calculations; in two hours he rowed into the west side and threw over his anchor in the dead water at Typer's Plantation. He turned in to sleep and was up at first dawn. As soon as he could see, he was searching the river with his binoculars. Every few minutes he was out to look, but in the intervals he cooked his breakfast of ham, fried eggs, fried potato, coffee and milk kept sweet with boracic acid—he was reckless.

Soon after eight o'clock he saw a little white shanty-boat moving down out of the sand-bar almost opposite him. He grinned to himself. He took a book labeled "Mississippi River Maps," and turned to Sheet No. 1.

"She's traveling by these same charts or how'd she know that little bay behind those willows?" he asked himself.

The shanty-boat made the water flicker for a time and then fell into the quivering reflection of the morning sunshine. When it was about a third of a mile below him, he hoisted his anchor and, with two pulls of his sweeps, entered the river current. The two boats moved down into Columbus Bend, and, as they came into the Iron Bank, they were hardly a hundred yards apart. He sat in his cabin, however, out of sight, reading one of a shelf of books with the word "Essays" over it. Under that shelf were several other shelves, each with a label.

The two boats were carried past Columbus within two hundred yards, and the house-boat floated toward the Chalk Bluff, after swirling in the Hickman Bluff current toward Wolf Island Chute. The man's boat went down the long chute and out of sight behind the sand-bar. When it was out of sight, the man turned up the outboard motor and steered at seven miles an hour around the long loop and floated down behind Wolf Island Towhead into Beckwith Bend current just as the little white shanty-boat swung to Lower Lees Landing.

Columbiana came out on the bow deck and stared at the motor-boat with a calculating gaze. She looked up the long dead water of Wolf Island Chute and then looked up the short, swift current of the main river down which she had floated. There was no sign of life on the house-boat; but how could a boat float five miles in a six-mile current and a boat float eight miles in a three-mile current and both arrive at the same point at the same time? Columbiana's expression was one of anxious, or at least grave, suspicion.

All day long the two boats floated down, almost within a toss. The river was falling, and they held to the trough near the mid-current. It was a navigable river, public and free. Any one in a craft had a right anywhere by living up to the rules. Columbiana, however, was doubtful. Nearly an hour before dusk she pulled into the dead water above Donaldson's Point about three miles. When she looked across the river, she saw the red cabin-boat floating around in the eddy at the foot of the filled-in Island No. 9. The boat made a complete circle around and then bumped into the bank for the night.

Columbiana shot a wild goose from a flock that came down within a hundred yards, killing it with a light rifle and retrieving it with a skiff. She hoped that scoundrel on yon side was watching her shoot, for that would be fair warning. In the morning she dropped out again about eight o'clock and then discovered that the swift peninsula current carried her right down to the motor-boat, which had started forty minutes before in a dragging current. So, as they passed the Slough Landing whisky-boat, they weren't two hundred yards apart, and at Gates Landing, two miles down, they were only a hundred yards apart.

Columbiana was vexed. She gazed steadfastly at the red boat without seeing any one. She had the feeling that in the cabin was a man watching her. She had that feeling for three hours, and then with her binoculars, as the stern of the boat swung around, she saw a man sitting inside the cabin, leaning back in a comfortable rocker with his feet on a bench, reading calmly and obliviously.

Then she was vexed to think that she had paid any attention to the horrid old thing. She landed in at New Madrid and went uptown to buy supplies. When she dropped passed Tiptonville, fifteen miles below, she saw a man coming down the bank at the ferry with an arm full of bundles and packages, and half an hour later she was perturbed to observe a cabined motor-boat floating down in the caving bend less than half a mile behind her. And, when she pulled into the foot of Merriwether Bend sand-bar, the motor-boat anchored about a mile below at the head of Little Cypress Bend sand-bar.

But the following morning, when she floated out, the motor-boat was gone from its anchorage, and in vain she looked for it up and down the river. She studied the caving bend below Island No. 13, and, when she passed Reelfoot, she pulled over close to see if the scoundrel had stopped along there in the shanty-boat town.

All day long she looked for him up and down, and, when she landed in, she shrugged her shoulders. In the morning, when she dropped out and turned the bend of Needham's Cut-off, a light song was choked in her throat by the discovery of a motor-boat a hundred yards from her port bow. Where it came from, and by what force, she could not tell. She would think of something else for a minute and then return with a start to the fact of the exasperating presence. She did not see the boat stir under any power. It drifted with the current—yet there it was!

That night she floated down the chute of Island No. 35, and anchored at the foot. Ten minutes later she saw the red boat anchored just over the sand-bar, practically just around the corner—and it had anchored there first! She couldn't even think a word.

Fishermen for the Mendova market were down this stretch of the river. The sporting resort of Gumbo Bend was at hand. Islands and sand-bars seemed to promise a thousand picnics for all. A long, narrow shanty-boat floated by just at dusk, and four men looked across at the pretty girl on the boat. One of them hailed:

"Hello, gal! Lonesome?"

Without a word she reached behind the door, and, before the ribald crew could more than duck, she fired five .25-20s through their cabin. One bullet hit the dish-cupboard, and the still night resounded with the fall of caving crockery and the crash of glassware.

On the night air was borne a whine:

"Aw, Red. What'd yo' want 'sult a riveh-lady fo'—yo' danged fool! Yo' mout of knowed yo'd git the wust of hit!"

A little later Columbiana saw the motor-boat drifting down by her anchorage and turning into the main current.

"Now where's he going?" she muttered.

The next instant there was a whiff of chill, and immediately there boiled up in the night a heaving, writhing, climbing gray mist, which rapidly assumed the proportions of a fog.

Columbiana shivered and entered the cabin, where, with the curtains pulled down, she tried to read a magazine essay. But she gave it up and turned to fiction, and so she read herself to sleep where she sat.

She was awakened by a loud, long laugh—"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

She blew the light and ran to look. She was adrift in the night with her anchor on the deck where she hadn't left it; on all sides was a fog as gray as sin.

CHAPTER III

A HA-HA-HA IN THE RIVER NIGHT

FOUR river-rats, treading water and cursing their luck, floated down Mendova Bend with their heads in the fog that hung black upon the night. They kept near enough to one another to talk in low voices, awed by their misfortune and wishing that they could find the scoundrel who had stolen their shanty-boat after they had filled it up with tons of loot from a water-front sporting-goods store.

Out there in mid-Mississippi it was like floating in a lake, except that once in a while they felt the water boiling around them and currents pulling them about. Water-rats that they were, they didn't mind floating down the current, even though it had been cold to plunge into the water; now it felt almost warm.

They kept their lungs full of air, breathing in short gasps, to float better, and they swore with angry, ignorant fluency. Some mean scoundrel had been too lazy to pull a trick and had robbed them after they had done all the hard work. They had carried guns and hardware and all that kind of stuff till they sweat and were dead-tired. They had taken all the chance of being caught by a bull or somebody or other, and, just when they had the safe and everything right, they find their boat stolen, their loot gone and themselves under the stern necessity of taking instant flight!

"Danged ole Mississip' all oveh ag'in!" one grumbled. " 'Membeh the time we was killin' beef in the Overflow an' we was left high an' dry into that Ohio sport's launch an' neveh did get to git out, Tid?"

"Yeh!" Tid's voice grumbled. "An' that time we took them logs out'n Wolf Riveh, nicest line of Black Walnut an' sech, an' the dang thing sunk on to us, afteh we'd got hit mos' to N'Orleans—Yo' 'membeh that, Rooter?"

"Sho! I wouldn't mind hit none if I could git to go up the bank, but hit don't agree with a feller. I'm always gittin' sick er took bad er arrested er sunthin' up the bank. Hit don' agree with me!"

"Me nuther!" a plaintive voice responded. "Sh-h-h!"

They all heard a sound and felt an echo through the water. They knew it as beavers know the slap of a beaver's tail. Sharply and eagerly they listened. It was the dip of a pair of oars—big oars—or long, shanty-boat sweeps.

"All right, boys!" a whisper went around the drifting pirate crew, and Tid added, "I'll rattle the water so's we won't git los' in this yeah danged thickenin'!"

They followed the touching splash he made as he reached toward the sound they heard. To the dipping of the oars was added the sound of a soliloquizing voice:

"Where in the world am I? Seems as if I'd ought to be getting somewhere! This must be the Mississippi! It can't be any lake! I never heard of any lake down here. Lake Pepin's up on the upper river. But this water isn't moving. I wonder——"

He began to pull his oars tentatively again. The swimmers, not without imagination, could think of the lost soft-paw standing there in the black gloom, looking in all directions and seeing nothing. The depths of his folly they did not know until they were baffled and disturbed by the apparition of a great, yellow glow in the night.

Tid stopped swimming, and the four stood erect in the water, treading, their faces faintly visible as they rode with their heads like pumpkins staring ahead at the source of that light. It was light enough for a steamboat, but they heard no paddle-wheels.

"Hit's that danged fool!" Tid managed to convey to the crew.

"Yeh!" they all breathed.

Tid moved toward the center of radiance, and they heard the tripper musing:

"I wonder which way is which? My! But this fog's thick! It's an awful eery feeling, out here all alone, not knowing which way is which! Why, I can't tell anything about it! It's just as if ghosts might be walking around. Ghosts would be lost in this like the river-man said wild geese are lost in canebreaks and river-bottoms sometimes. I can't tell anything by the maps—they're—Wha—what's that?"

The pirates, too, stopped to listen. Somewhere around in the fog was something. It was a sound, and the sound grew from a rattling death-cough to a loud, long laughing—

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-a!"

"Fo' lawse—a gosh!" one of the pirates breathed, and through the fog of yellow-golden haze returned a quick reply:

"What—what's that? Did somebody speak?"

"Nope!" Tid replied without thinking, and the drifting soft-paw started to laugh but stopped suddenly.

"Hello!" he called doubtfully.

There was no answer. He called louder, and there was still no reply. Then he shouted, and a minute later his bellow returned doubled in volume from some bank of trees or bluffs alongshore.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-a!" a laugh followed out of the fog, and for the first time the pirates all felt very, very cold.

"Gosh!" they heard the soft-paw muttering. "That man's crazy! This river's crazy! How'd I get to floating off down the Mississippi! Why, I had two anchors out, and I—and I know I tied the ropes fast. I wonder—somebody must have turned me loose!"

Tid turned and looked at his mates. They could see one another plainly now, and their expressions were puzzled and baffled. They, too, had seen a shanty-boat where it wasn't—or where it ought to have been. Some darned scoundrel . . . .

However, they had something personal to attend to just then. If the old river was tricking them same as usual, they couldn't float around all night and perhaps two or three days in a falling river, waiting for the fog to lift so that they would know where they were. Right there ahead of them was a shanty-boat, and it was a soft-paw. Soft-paws notoriously never thought anything about people. At the same time Tid decided he had better be polite.

"Excuse me, mister!" he hailed. "Give us a ride? Our maw is sick down the river to Memphis, and we's in a hurry, and we thought likely you'd let us ride down with you."

"Certainly! Row right over this way!" the soft-paw replied.

"I'm Re—I'm Thomas Cumstark, an' I got my three brothers with me," Tid explained and began to swim.

The other pirates, too, began to swim.

It was a thick fog, and they were close to the shanty-boat. Their splashing to a soft-paw's inexperienced ears sounded something like dipping oars, and they were swimming fast.

"Look out!" Caroost cried. "You may ram me!"

Tid looked up into a great hanging lamp suspended from the bow of a shanty-boat porch; as he looked up, the shanty-boater looked down. The soft-paw for the moment was dazzled. He evidently saw the four heads coming in line *en échelon*, for he gave a slight squawk of astonished excitement. And then with a yell of determination he turned and fled. He choked as he dashed through the cabin to the deck at the other end of the flatboat.

Tid caught the bow-bumper and scrambled out like a mink, drawing his automatic pistol as he did so and shaking the water out of it. But the soft-paw had not gone after a gun. Caroost cast off the line of the skiff floating at the opposite end of the boat and with a pull and a jerk set the boat from the flat and shoved clear into the fog.

"Gosh!" the pirates heard him exclaim. "What a river! What were they?"

Awkwardly but quickly the soft-paw set the oars in the locks and began to row full-speed away into the black night. As he took his departure, they heard an answering consolation:

"All right! I'm a-coming! Ha-ha-ha-aha-a!"

"Oh!" the pirates heard the soft-paw ejaculate. "He's a madman!"

THE pirates knew what to do. They unswung the lamps in the bow and stern of the boat, blew them out but left the little table-lamp inside burning. They closed the doors and pulled down the window-shades. One stood outside at the sweeps while the others looked around.

It was a nice twenty-four-foot shanty-boat with deep hull, six-foot-six high cabin and two rooms, kitchen and living-room. A lot of ammunition for a sixteen-gage shotgun and a .25-20 rifle were on the tops of the gunwales, and the siding of the boat had been laid on good waterproof roofing. It was a tight, warm boat There were three stoves: a wood or coa heater, a cooker and a three-burner oil-stove.

On the stove was a funny jigger of a coffee-pot that was spouting up inside itself. But the coffee smelled all right, and, after they had all sampled it, they thought it tasted all right—except that there wasn't so much flavoring in it as when one boils coffee in a regular coffee-pot and has the grounds to chew on.

The bed was wide enough for two, and there was enough stuff to make another bed on the floor, especially as there were two thin mattresses on the bedstead, besides the chain-springs.

"Hit's a purty good boat," Tid admitted. "Hit ain't nothing like so big's the one we got off that store-boater up the Ohio when he was drunk, but hit's a good un to operate from. What you 'low he done with all them books—sell 'em? Who'd buy 'em, anyhow?"

At intervals, while they inspected their new property, they stepped outside to listen. All was quiet again. The soft-paw wasn't inviting any wild loon crazy man to find him, and the laughter was silent, too. In low voices the river-men tried to straighten out the wonder of their adventure. Of course, it was easy enough to explain a fool soft-paw floating down in the night, when he had tied up at dark. Soft-paws don't know much about making boats fast to stakes or anything. But their own big boat had gone adrift.

Also, that laugh—that made chills in their souls. It never did anybody any good to hear hard laughing like that in a fog. No wonder the soft-paw had suddenly choked into silence. They could hear him rowing away, slowly, stopping at intervals—to look around no doubt.

They threw some water on the oar-pins of the shanty-boat, so they wouldn't squeak and, after listening a while, determined that they were dropping down a long bend, and, if they pulled away from the noise of rustling waters and the splash and crash of sawyers and the lumping in of the bank, they would get to the sand-bar opposite or run into the dead water or eddy where they could anchor. Figuring as they could, they estimated they had been in the water long enough to float about fifteen miles, which would take them into the horse-shoe bend below Mendova where they could land—but on second thought they guessed they wouldn't land.

"Probably they'll be lookin' around fer suspicious characters," Tid muttered resentfully. "An' they'd likely suspect us if they'd see us. Course, we could dress up real fancy in this here feller's clothes, but four different-sized fellers all in the same size pants 'd probably make them sheriffs think sunthin'——"

"Hit shore would!" Rooter grumbled. "Course, we ain't rightly guilty of stealin' nothin'! We didn't get to getaway with them things——"

"An' they got our boat, so's I bet they's stoled hit! That'd give us kind of a holt on 'em," one suggested.

"If we wanted to exercise hit," Tid squinted one eye. "Co'rse——"

"Co'rse!" the others echoed.

Accordingly, they let their boat drift with the current. As they drifted in silence, having drunk some coffee and eaten some canned fish and cased ginger-snaps, they blew their lights and went out on the bow deck to kind of keep track of things. Lots of times they had cut loose in the night or in a fog and gone to sleep, but not this night. Somehow, they didn't feel like sleeping.

As they sat there on the wall-benches of the bow, they heard a sort of cross between a yelp and a squall, followed by:

"Tom—you old fool—Tom! Wake up—Tom—hi-i! Tom!"

"Hit's a lady," Tid explained in a low, cautious voice. "Some lady——"

They heard a "sn-lop" sound carried across the water surface as a sound sleeper awakened with difficulty.

"Heh?" the sleeper asked querulously.

"Yo' ole fool!" the woman fairly screamed. "I tole yo' now for six weeks yo' needed a new morrin'-line, an' now where be we? Now where be we?"

"Hey—what!" the man demanded.

"Hey what! Hey what! Yo' ole fool, hyar we be goned adrift, an' laws knows where we be—driftin' up on to a towheader sucking inter a cavin' bank. Where be we? I tole yo'——"

"Well, dad drat hit!" the voice retorted. "Spos'n ye did tell me! Spos'n—a new line'd cost fourteen cents a poun'——"

"Yeh—yeh! An' hyar we be, gittin' drowned er sucked in under a tow—yo' didn't half tie them ropes, an' neveh did! Jes' 'cause I didn't go out'n tie them lines oveh ag'in, hyar we be. An' we're 'n—my line! I got mos'n to swearin', an'—oh, go put on yer pants! Yo'll ketch yer death o' cold. I got 'er! Hit's foggy as the ole scratch—shut up! Now, George Ebenezer! Stop your crying! It ain't nothin 'at all! Many's the time we tripped at night——"

The wail of a small boy, scared of tripping in the fog, had taken the river-lady's attention.

"Yo' ole fool!" she began all over again. "What'd yo' tie them lines to last night? That two-inch Gove'ment line never bruck!"

"I tied the starboard one to a big cypress snag," the man replied, "two half-hitches an' a bight, same's——"

"Tell me same 's yo' always did! Didn't yo' make a half-noose jes' up by Putney Bend? An' didn't yo' slip yo' stakes off, into Tiptonville? An' then down by Little Prairie Bend, yo' old fool, yo' used willer stakes into a cavin' bank, an', if hit hadn't been fer that big gum root I tied to, yo'd——"

"I bet that's Mrs. Mahna!" Tid turned to his mates. "She's allus givin' old Mahna down the banks thataway! She kin remember on to him ten yea——"

"Hark! Shut yo' ole fool mouth—listen? I hearn——"

"Lawse!" Tid whispered. "Likely I drawed her fiah now!"

"I ain' said no——"

"Oh, shut up, yo' ole fool! Keep still—ain' I tryin' to listen? Mebby hit's—U-whoo!"

Not one of the pirates made answer.

"U-whoo!" the voice exclaimed more determinedly, and then she turned on her man again. "If yo' hadn't made so much noise, yo' ole fool, likely hit's somebody trippin' nights. I neveh 'lowed to trip nights, 'thout hit's necessary. Listen! Hear that echo come back? Hit's the bank er off'n the side of anotheh shanty-boat. U-Whoo!"

She stopped, listened, heard something and began again:

"Theh — hear hit! Right in theh! Likely—I bet hit's some of them darn riveh-rats. They kin hear well's we kin. Bring that big rifle, yo' ole fool—I kin feel somebody right aroun' yeah, an' I'm goin' to plug around. Nobody'd not answer but riveh-pirates, an' I——"

"Hit's us!" Tid raised his voice. "Hit's us, Mrs. Mahna. We jes' woked up an'——"

"Time yo' woked up. Neveh mind, George Ebenezer—don' shoot! Who yo' all, anyhow?"

"Why, hit's Tid an'——"

"Oh, I know who 'tis, now—what yo' doin'? What yo' trippin' nights fo', anyhow? I bet yo' be'n doin' meanness er sunthin'!"

"No'm! No'm! We jes was into a hurry, an'——"

"Yeh—an' p'lice wa'nt quick 'nough to git yo'! I know! Lawse! Ain' this fog thicker'n all git aout?"

She was pulling her sweeps, following the sound and coming through the black night. Suddenly she banged into the other boat.

"Yo' ole fools, yo'!" she screamed. "Where's yo' lights?"

Just then through the fog returned a long, breaking laughter.

"Fo' lan's sake!" she gasped. "What's that?"

CHAPTER IV

COLUMBIANA LISTENS, FIRST, AMUSED; SECOND, SORRY

COLUMBIANA MUSCATINE O'BINE stood staring out into the gray fog. In the abstraction of her reading and the depths of her subsequent sleep, she had drifted clear. She found her anchor on the bow deck and the rope hanging down. It had been hauled up, handed over, and she had floated out.

Now she didn't know how long she had been floating, except that she had gone to sleep around nine o'clock. She didn't think she had been cut loose before that. It was now midnight, or past. Uneasily she stood at her sweeps, trying to penetrate the gloom with her gaze. Even when her eyes grew accustomed to the dark, she could see nothing. It was as if she were blind and in mid-river, going whither she could not tell—whether around and around in an eddy, or whether swiftly down the semicircle of a long bend.

She felt the boat heaving ever so little, up and down, as if in long rollers, and she knew it was a crossing. It might be above Mendova in the reach or at the foot of Mendova Bend or away down below Mendova.

She remembered the pirates, and her hand stole to the butt of her automatic. She went through her two rooms and looked around from her stern deck with an electric-flash to see by—but all she could see was the fog, dragging into lines. The fog eddied around in coils, spirals, puffs and lumps. At first she thought perhaps she could tell in which direction she was floating by watching the fog dragging by, but it drew first one way and then another. It was full of light airs, zephyrs, and never twice alike in its shape or drift.

The fog was soon full of sounds. She heard far-away voices, rustling and washing of water and then the tinkling or ringing of a bell, curiously distorted by the fog. She heard shouts and calls. A dull glow in the fog puzzled her for a little, and then she realized that it must be Mendova lights reflected on the fog. But she couldn't tell in which direction it was. It seemed to be all around the boat and even reflected enough on the water to enable her to see the surface.

In a little while it was gone again—and then just fog! It was fog across the river, which was alive now with voices and splashes and other sounds. She heard babbling by humans, as it seemed, all around her. She heard a dog whining somewhere; she heard a baby's wail; she heard the bumping of oars on their pins.

"Sounds as if everybody was afloat tonight!" she told herself.

The thought gave her an ominous twinge. The Mississippi River is a stranger to its own people. It occurred to her that perhaps there had been some great change in the Bottoms; perhaps the lands had sunk again, and perhaps there had been earthquakes, eruptions, caves and upheavals? Things are never twice alike down that river. The anchor on her deck—that was kind of human and mischievous, but the voices and whisperings in the dark—the passing of strange sounds among human voices.

The wonder, more than the ominousness, appealed to her. She heard some one say something plain at last. Some one hailed:

"Say, Jack! There's an awful fog on the river!"

"Tha' so?" some one asked sleepily.

"Yeh! Say, Jack—Jack—Jack—*Jack!* Say—we're adrift, Jack! Say——"

Columbiana heard some one tumbling out of a squeaky bunk or bed and heard a pattering of feet.

"That's right. What the—say! What—where—what 'd you tie to?"

"Me—me—I didn't——"

"What—why—yes, you did—you——"

"Me—you tied yourself—to that sand-bar snag——"

"That was when we stopped to hunt rabbits. We anchored——"

"That's so—we did anchor. I'll go look——"

A minute later a voice cried:

"Say, Tim! The rope's gone!"

"Slipped off the cleat! That's what it done. Slipped——"

"Slip yer gran'mother! It was tied to the tow-bitts, and through the hawser hole—why! Here's the anchor——"

"Hold on, Jack!" a voice said a minute later. "Better start the motor—kind of slow so you got headway to steer——"

"You fools!" Columbiana exclaimed. "You'll ram somebody or run aground—the river's falling——"

"Hark!" the two men exclaimed and listened, one continuing, "I thought I heard somebody. Somebody say we'd ram something——"

"So'd I. What do you suppose—" the voices trailed.

The voices were silenced. Columbiana could fairly hear them trying to listen. She started to laugh, but on second thought she didn't. She had heard something laughing before that night. She didn't feel like being that kind of something. Besides, something was crazy on the old Mississip', and no one cares to be caught up with an absent mind or too frivolous when things none can understand are abroad on the river.

At the same time a glint of anger shot through Columbiana's mind. For days she had been just about the same as bumping into that motor-boat with the nice-looking and impudent-acting man, whom she had seen playing with the children up on Putney Bend bar, on board.

She heard a rowboat coming. The oars were dipping with energy, and they were continuing with speed. Somebody was rowing fast—and in that fog! She had only time to think of that, and then almost at her feet the skiff passed by; she heard its cutwater slicing the surface and felt it going through the fog. In a minute it was somewhere toward her left hand. Then, suddenly, out there in the black she heard a crash.

The skiff had run into something. She heard it scraping along on the side of something. She heard a voice calling excitedly:

"Excuse me! Excuse me! Excuse me!"

A minute later she heard a hail:

"Hello—hello, on board!"

There was no reply. By and by she heard some one scraping up over the side of a boat. She could even hear the lopping as a rope was thrown around a timber-head or over a large cleat. She heard footsteps and another hail; she heard somebody rapping on a door or the side of a cabin, and that made her laugh.

"If there are just women on board that boat, the next thing will be gunshots!" Columbiana said to herself. "I don't know why any woman would be tripping down in this fog at night any more than I know why I am, but if they are and Mister Man comes knocking on the door instead of hailing from five or ten yards, like a gentleman——"

But there were no shots. Instead, she heard the skiffman fall over something in a cabin, something that sounded like the cross between a crowbar and a stick of cordwood. Then she heard an exclamation:

"My land! I wonder what this is! My land—it's awful extraordinary, this is—down the river—my land!"

Columbiana listened, thinking judiciously.

"That," she said, "sounds like a soft-paw—only a soft-paw would go rowing at full speed in a fog like this—unless he was being chased. Perhaps he was being chased. But I know that voice. Where—um! Putney Bend!"

Confusion was abroad that night on the Mississippi. Columbiana had considerable knowledge of the river's whims and whimsies, and she was in an expectant mood in consequence. From all directions she heard the passing of shanty-boat and motor-boat sounds. Away off yonder, some motor-boat man was running his engine with the cut-out open, and the throbbing of the exhaust whaled through the fog, hammering the ears—though it was miles away. Suddenly the motor choked up and then exploded with a hoarser note—in reverse.

"The fool—driving like that in a fog!" Columbiana muttered. "Looks as if all the fools were tripping down—what do they want to float in the fog for, anyhow?"

She paused for answer. Then she choked—"What'm I out for, anyhow—like the rest of them?"

Indignant rebellion against her predicament, not knowing which way to row to get anywhere, succumbed to awe—awe of the strange experience. She didn't understand, and she couldn't just remember how deep she had cast her anchor, being bothered by that fool who had been following her along down. Then, as if to lighten her wonders, there fell upon her ears the music of an accordion. Somebody out yonder was taking to music for solace or for revenge or just for the music.

It was wonderful, that gay, rippling tune, full of Italian grace and tripping inspiration. In that gray gloom of night, it was like a ship going down with the band playing—but it did quicken the spirits of the young woman. It wasn't ghostly, that music, but human and companionable like a fleet of shanty-boaters going by on a starlight night with all hands romping to the calls of a square-set.

At the end of the tune there was silence, deeper than ever. People seemed to be all around. A voice rose in a long-drawn call—

"Keep'r up, old hoss!"

THE accordion began again in assent. It was half a mile from Columbiana, and a quarter of a mile in another direction she heard somebody "Patting Juba" sharply with his hands. Then a banjo began to pick in, somewhere near the accordion, and a violin began to play second. The violin hadn't played a minute when a big gimp string snapped and a voice rose in melancholic wailing.

"I ain't got no mo' gimp strings!" he announced. "Yo' cayn't play right in no fog!"

"Nobody asted yo' to play!" a jeering voice called from another quarter.

Columbiana listened in increasing amazement. No less than ten boats were somewhere around her; she could hear the people talking; she heard the music; she felt their presence—and then somebody yelled:

"Who set my boat loose? Where the —— am I at?"

"Oh, you're tripping down!" Columbiana called with feminine sweetness.

"Who are you?" the rasping masculine voice demanded.

"Me? Oh, Old Mississip's second wife," she replied.

Instantly from away off yonder a voice swore profanely—

"Well, by the Lord Harry, if I'd married any such dad-blasted old son of a no-'count son-of-a-gun 's him, I bet I'd shift him an' 'vorce him!"

"Why?" Columbiana asked.

"Why? Why?" the man yelled, "Why, dang blast hit! I went to sleep up in Mendova Bend on to Gas House Slough an' I had a good job at three-fifty a day, an' now where the —— am I, an' how the —— 'd I get here in this dangblasted fog—hey?"

"That's no way to talk to a lady!" Columbiana called imperturbably.

"Lady! Lady! No lady ever married this danged Old Mississip'!" he retorted, discourteously.

"My husband will sink you for talking that way," Columbiana suggested.

"Hit wouldn't be the fustest time!" the man yelled. "I ain't done nothin' but sink er fight, drift er hunt for my dang-blasted boat, since I come down here to live cheap into a shanty-boat."

"Oh, I thought you talked like an Up-the-Banker!" Columbiana said.

"Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-a-a!" a laughing clatter came through the fog, and all other sounds ceased while the chilling echoes returned from both sides of the river and from the sides of none could tell how many shanty-boats, after the baffling manner of fogged-in sounds.

Repartee ceased. There was no competition with that dank and thrilling sound, demoniac laughter neither distant nor yet near at hand. Old river-people knew the symptoms of that night. Old Mississip' was up to some deviltry, and no one was escaping. Columbiana had thrown a chill about when she said she was old Mississip's second wife. She knew they were probably calculating on the chances of whether or not she had told the truth. Lord help the man who insulted her if she had!

She counted the boats which she could identify by their sounds, old-timers—men and women—declaring to gracious they never had heard the beat, were mingled with Up-the-Bankers, who called in futile endeavor to discover where they were at.

"Wu-hoo!" Columbiana called suddenly. "Is that you, Mrs. Mahna?"

"Yes, indeedy, Columbiana!" Mrs. Mahna replied. "I 'lowed hit were yo', 'count of yo' laughing at them through-trippers! What yo' reckon ails us?"

"Old Mississip'!" Columbiana suggested. "Where'd yo' tie in at?"

"Yeh! Up above Mendova into the head of the Islands. Now we's down away below Mendova—I could smell them cotton-seed-oil mills theh, 'sides hear the p'lice autymobill comin' by when we was drappin' along. Wheh'd yo' start at?"

"Into the foot of the Chute of Thirty-Five."

"Well, I hope to goodness I ain't neveh seen no beat of this! Up above yeah, I was pullin' my daylights out, an' they was a whole passel of them riveh-rat scoundrels, an' theh was Tid an' Rooter an' them pirates right acrost the way I was goin', neveh sayin' nothin' tell I bunked and bammed 'em. Shucks! They'd lost theh boat, they said, an' theh they was into a soft-paw's, out'n the Forks, some'rs—a red boat, an' I bet they killed 'im——"

"Aw—we ain't nuther! Mrs. Mahna, hit ain' so!" a voice returned out of the fog, and Mrs. Mahna exclaimed:

"Gracious! I 'lowed I was shet of yo' scoundrels—I bet yo' done somethin' this night——"

"We ain't!" the voice retorted, and then the two women heard somebody begin to pull on a pair of sweeps.

The sound moved away in the fog, and Mrs. Mahna chuckled as she cupped her hands to talk across to Columbiana.

"I bet them fellers is scairt of sunthin'!"

Every little while there would be a yell of excitement, or at least agitation, as some sleeper awakened and hailed the fog. The old-timers would answer back with a roar of laughter, but the laughter quickly perished. Word had gone around: several boats from Gas-House Slough at Mendova, boats from the shanty-town at Mutton Island and through Sentinel Cut-off and trippers who had just landed in—they didn't know where—were within a mile or so. And word passed up and down that indicated four or five miles in the shanty-boat fleet. A few laughed, but mostly it was indignation, tempered by mystery and superstition.

While they wondered, listening to the music, or cursed the occasion, there was a sudden flare through the gray gloom. Instead of black night, it was gray day. Columbiana clambered to the roof of her cabin and found her head above the level of the mist. She could see the trees on both banks and here and there a flagpole or the riding-light of a motor-boat flagstaff—pale in the dawn.

As she looked, other heads appeared above the fog here and there as far as she could see: heads of men and women, some with whiskers and some with disheveled hair, some with circles of agitated fog around them as they waved their arms.

Through the fog echoed the laugh of the night, and half an hour later the fog was gone, except for little shreds. Forty or fifty shanty-boats and motor-boats pulled shoreward, and eddies where there hadn't been three boats at once in twenty years suddenly had whole shanty-boat towns with an indignant, puzzled and revengeful population.

Columbiana floated down close to the west bank eddies till she saw a tall, slim man with thin, brown face standing on a great shanty-boat deck with an expression of bewilderment on his features.

"Excuse me!" he hailed her. "I am greatly disturbed, perturbed, and I am a stranger down the river——"

"A soft-paw?" she asked, sweetly.

"Yes, indeed! Just so; if you——"

"All right," she smiled. "I'll come over and see what's the matter."

She pulled in and made fast to the stern of the big boat. She climbed aboard and went into the cabin. It was stacked with rifles, shotguns, great heaps of ammunition, cutlery, fishing-tackle, nets, bales of net-twine and bushels of unassorted material.

She looked at the rough heaps and stacks and bundles. Then she looked at the man who stood there, equally bewildered, but helpless instead of experienced and efficient as she was.

Columbiana looked the outfit over, walking around it and sniffed through the cluttered up kitchen-gallery, and disheveled bunk-rooms. There were tons of the stuff, and it was inexplicable to her mind. It was a sporting-goods store run riot. She sat down on a bale of rope and considered. She was sitting there when the shiver of a gentle bump ran through the craft. The next instant, there was the trampling of feet, and the doorway flashed with figures rapidly entering, one by one.

"Hyar they be, boys!" the leader shouted, exultantly. "Hands up! Yo' riveh-pirates don't git by Sheriff Dabonne, neveh indeed!"

The astonished soft-paw stared wide-eyed through his big, round glasses at the muzzles of several black and blue automatics. The pretty girl glanced calmly from raider to raider, and she was sorry for Caroost, sorry for herself. She had been too long on the river not to know the terror of circumstantial evidence applied to shanty-boaters.

"Yo' two alone on this yeah boat?" Sheriff Dabonne demanded. "Ho law! Yo' two's swell-lookin' pirates. All dressed up, eh? Sho!"

"Shucks!" Columbiana looked him in the eye to say. "Are honest folks so scarce where you're from that you don't know them when you see them. Not that kind!"

"Hue-e!" members of the posse yelled, and the sheriff reddened.

"Yo' all cayn't play no innocent game on me!" he declared. "We gets five hundred dollars for this year outfit up to Mendova, yo' two! Yes, indeed! All this stolen goods on yo'. Sho! We shore got a haul this time, boys!"

"Stolen! Stolen goods!" the man exclaimed. "My land!"

CHAPTER V

CHIEF CLUMB LOSES HIS PATROL

A SOFT-PAW remains just "that soft-paw" or "the soft-paw" until something happens to him to give interest to his name and make somebody of him. James M. Caroost had preserved his nonentity for a thousand miles while he floated down the Mississippi. The Indian youth seeks an opportunity to distinguish himself, become somebody and earn a name. James M. Caroost, having a long and inherited name, had never dreamed that he would ever become subject to the immutable laws of humanity and under the necessity of being somebody all by himself and without regard to the fortune which his ancestors had acquired. He had presumed to be a highbrow adventurer with a purpose.

The commercial agencies who list men according to their finances had the name of James M. Caroost indexed with a credit of one hundred thousand dollars; it had more than a dozen of the Caroost relatives listed, too, and the aggregate rating was satisfactory to any one from the maker of a player-piano to a promoter of speculative securities seeking some one willing to take a chance.

The name Caroost was utterly unknown down the Mississippi. No shanty-boat man had ever borne it; no fugitive from justice had ever assumed it; no lady had ever run away from home on its account; no man had ever come down the river to hide its shame; and at first James M. Caroost had no distinguishing qualities, except rather more complete ignorance of river ways than common in soft-paws, to mark him among a sore-handed crowd of anxious and worried trippers. His inquiries about one Mr. Barklow Waldin seemed a fad in him.

But no sooner had he been arrested with Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine than all the shanty-boaters from Pittsburgh to the Passes heard of him. Nobody could figure it out. Nobody believed the wildly improbable ideas that were suggested and became discards immediately. It was some time before a whispering grew to a certainty.

James M. Caroost was sure a lucky lad, if ever there was one. That O'Bine girl had just naturally been too proud to escape Old Mississip', even if she had sassed and escaped about every one and everything else from above the Forks down to New Orleans. Just imagine the glory of being arrested with the prettiest and least approachable girl on the Mississippi. Some folks are just naturally fools for luck! Or at least are born lucky.

Sheriff Dabonne took the two down the crossing in the big shanty-boat, loaded with loot, and tied in at Briscol County court landing. Thence he marched them, handcuffed together, up to the jail and locked them safely in separate cells while he notified Chief Clumb of Mendova over the telephone of the capture. The facts were printed in the afternoon newspapers as far away as St. Louis and New Orleans, and overnight about everybody on the river had heard of the matter.

Nobody believed on the river that Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine and James M. Caroost had actually robbed the famous Duck and Deer sporting-goods store, where everybody on the way down stopped to purchase ammunition or fish-hooks, or something just for the sake of getting acquainted with the noted Dart Coldby of Mendova, who knew all the gunmen east of the Mississippi and all the long riders and robbers west of that thoroughfare and dividing-line, not to mention a great assortment of river - pirates, sportsmen and Gipsies.

But at the same time no one in Mendova official circles or in any of the various sheriff outfits along the river bar believed that Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine was a river queen of pirates and that Caroost was a desperado from Broadway, New York, or Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

Chief Clumb drove down to Briscol court landing in the department's fast motorboat, the *Dareall*. He landed and walked up to the jail and had dinner with Sheriff Dabonne and had a glass of soda water, for Briscol County was dry, and a good cigar for a smoke. Dabonne told how he had tried to understand the things that Miss O'Bine had said to Caroost in a low, earnest voice. He had heard her say something about a "foolish soft-paw," "five years on the State farm" and similar incriminating things, Caroost being red-faced and helpless to deny.

"They're a bad pair," Sheriff Dabonne warned. "You'n your engineer wants to keep your eyes on 'em, for they are slick riveh artists, if eveh there was one down thisaway!"

Dabonne had the jailer bring out the two prisoners, and Clumb slipped one pair of handcuffs on them, chaining Caroost's right hand to Columbiana's left wrist. She looked at the two representatives of Government with narrowing eyes, and Caroost bit his lower lip in confusion. The period in the jail had not overcome his embarrassment nor her alert indignation.

They were just going to walk down Main Street and over the levee when the telephone bell rang and Sheriff Dabonne listened with disgust to the fact that he must go with two deputies back into the brakes to hunt for a negro who had been ructioning around with a club.

That left Clumb and the two prisoners

to walk along the street together. The chief was not averse to the parade. They went over the levee and down to the landing. Several shanty-boats were tied along the bank, and a stern-wheel tow-boat, the *Bridle*, had just hooked on to the fifty-foot cabin-boat, loaded with the Duck and Deer loot, which had been under a deputy's guard till it was turned over to the Mendova chief.

The *Dareall* scout-boat was all ready to take on the prisoners and start up the river, but at the last moment Chief Clumb discovered that he didn't have a cigar, except the one between his teeth. Neither did Croty, the motor-boat engineer cop.

"I'll run up an' get some, Chief!" Croty said, and Clumb handed him a five-spot. Croty ran up the bank, and Columbiana and Caroost clambered rather awkwardly into the bow of the launch.

At that moment a man emerged from a red cabin-boat down the eddy and began to toss chunks of wood on to the bow deck. The wood made a hollow, booming sound, and Caroost glanced that way. He started up from his seat and began to exclaim—

"Why, that's——"

Columbiana pulled him down beside her with a low hiss—

"Yo' fool!"

Happily, Clumb was casting an eagle-glance at the energetic shanty-boater. He even moved in the shanty-boater's direction, keeping a sharp eye on the man. Being Chief of the Mendova Police, Clumb always looked strange river outfits over, and he didn't exactly recognize the shanty-boater. But he had the feeling that he ought to.

"I beg pardon," Caroost turned to her softly. "Did I hurt your wrist?"

"No—that shanty-boater's a friend of ours," she replied in a voice scarcely audible.

"I'm sure sorry—this thing's up to me. My ancestors helped to settle Ohio and Indiana, and they were very successful people. They were famous Indian-fighters and had many hair-breadth escapes and ——"

"Don't strain your imagination," she glared at him. "Did they wear black-rimmed specs?"

"I don't need them," he flushed, taking the black bows from his eyes. "You see—I thought they gave me a kind of intellectual appearance. Apparently, looking intellectual isn't any help to me!"

With his dark-rimmed spectacles off he wasn't anywhere near the same looking man. Clumb was thirty yards down the bank by this time, and he glanced back and saw the two sitting numbly in the launch. As he looked, the shanty-boater gave them an eloquent look, a gesture that Columbiana understood but which Caroost, looking at her, did not even see.

A talking-machine on the little red shanty-boat started a brass band record, and the shanty-boater threw armfuls of wood on to the shanty-boat bow. The tow-boat, having straightened up the big boat of loot, was splashing and sighing out at the eddy edge. A sawmill down the levee was roaring, and the band-saw began to scream through a knot.

Columbiana reached and slipped the mooring-line from the cleat on the bow of the launch and moved into the steerman's seat. Inspired, Caroost kicked the battery-starter switch and threw in the reverse. The motor-boat backed swiftly and, as a good police-boat should, noiselessly out into the eddy. Then the girl swung the bow sharply down the eddy, and he threw over the reverse. The boat shook with the change of the power from astern to ahead.

The next instant the *Dareall* was lifting her bow out of water and beginning to skim over the surface. And then Chief Clumb turned. He saw the two prisoners crouching and swinging out into the current fifty yards away. He snatched out his automatic pistol and began to empty it, but in vain. His heavy bullets slapped into the water, first on one side, then the other, and skipped off across the river surface for half a mile in shortening jumps.

Chief Clumb yelled profanity, threats, orders, but the patrol-boat merely swung wide, straightened out, squatted more and more at the stern and began to boil away down-stream.

It was the swiftest boat for miles along the river. It had a double engine with automatic couplings, and, when both sets of cylinders were applied to the screw, the bow rose from the surface, and, standing on her tail, the *Dareall* scooted like a wild goose stepping in the water for fun.

IN THREE minutes the boat was, to Chief Clumb's gaze, a mere agitation a long way down the river. And in seven minutes there was nothing in sight to lend possibility to the hope that there would be a break-down. What Chief Clumb remarked to his subordinate with a handful of cigars is utterly unthinkable, unless one has heard a river-town policeman swing his tongue on such an occasion.

When the escapers had gone from sight, Clumb turned wrathfully on the shanty-boater.

"Theh—theh, yo' scoundrel. See what you done, distracting my attention!"

Clumb choked in his anger and effort to find a scapegoat.

"What all did they do?" the river-man asked with all the innocence Tid could muster.

"Do—do! They stole the Duck and Deer stock——"

"They did! Sho! That lil' gal an' that feller—the paper said there was a big safe—them two tote a safe across Mendova mud an' sand-bar!"

Clumb's jaw dropped. How had those not overly-strong river man and girl carried a weight like that—carried the tons of merchandise in the short time they had had to work, between the passings of the patrolman on the beat? Clumb saw and was dazed by the point.

"Riveh-pirates could do anything!" Clumb declared angrily. "Co'rse, they could——"

Tid laughed as if he had been paid a compliment, but he said seriously:

"Them two ain' no scoundrels, Chief! They's jes a soft-paw an' one of them independent riveh-gals—so they say. I hearn tell some real riveh-rats done hit an' was snucked off 'n the night. Somebody cut 'em loose—an' when they got down theh, the boat was gone, an' they hadn't time to bust open the safe——"

"Who said that?" Clumb demanded sharply.

"Feller drappin' by ouh bo't las' night, suh—up on the County bar, suh."

"Shucks!" Clumb snorted indignantly. "Yo' shanty-boaters is all crooks and all riveh-rats, an', when we catch one bunch of yo', hit's neveh the right bunch, accordin' to yo' tell. Them two——"

"Yas, suh," admitted Tid humbly. "Theh's a heap of iggerance up the bank about what's down the eddy, yas, indeedy!"

"They had the boat and they had the loot!" Clumb declared, justifying his conclusion.

"Columbiana's bo't was theh with hit—an' Caroost's skift, too; 'cordin' to the paper, they said they found hit deserted into the fog, and they salvaged hit, 'count of nobody bein' on to hit. Hadn't be'n fo' them, that boat'd be'n by Memphis an' clost to Vicksburg er Helena, anyhow, by now. What they said stood to reason, Chief!"

"They had them goods on, an' they was receivers on hit!" Clumb retorted.

"I hate to see innocent fellers took up," Tid suggested.

"Likely yo' know all about hit?" Clumb turned suspiciously.

"No, suh; I'm jes' a drifter. That big boat was comin' down, mostly nights; feller name of Tid an' one name of Rooter had hit—four fellers."

"Tid? Ain't that Red——"

"Yassuh, a mean little scoundrel—'bout my size, suh, leetle heavier," Tid said without batting an eyelash and as innocent as the river in appearance.

"How come hit that feller 'n his gal was on to that bo't?"

"Yas, suh—hit's seo. Theh they was! But hyar I be, too; likely yo' ain't hearn about hit, but about a hundred shanty-boats jes' cut loose by theirselves, an' fust anybody knowed he wa'n't theh no mo', but five, ten, twenty-five mile down-stream an' in the dang-blastedest fog——"

"Why—Mendova wharf-boat cut loose, too!"

"Yas, suh—hit's what I'm tellin' yo'. Nobody reg'lar wa'n't accountable fo' nothin' that night. Them pirates had awful hard luck, Chief. Jes' when theh'd got that boat loaded down, an' when they'd brung down that safe, the boat was cut loose, an' theh they was with yo'n' all them bulls coming down. An' they had to git to swim fo' hit down the bend that night er git took up. Them pirates got Caroost's bo't—that's what they say. 'Whisky Sam' was tellin'——"

"I'd like to git my hands on Whisky Sam!" Clumb grumbled. "I bet he lands a thousand pints into Mendova every week, an' Mendova's dry!"

"Yas, suh, Chief—but not so overly dry, at that!"

"I'd bust his haid!"

"Yas, suh—but hit's tolerable thick, suh. Yo' hadn't no call to 'rest Columbiana an' that feller. He waren't nothin' but a soft-paw. Co'se, he ain't no soft-paw, not now. He's 'sperienced, now. If he hain't a reg'lar ole riveh-man already, Columbiana 'll shore make one of him. Yas, indeed!"

"Yo' tell folks around that I offer five hundred dollars reward for them two scoundrels!" Clumb cried out angrily, his judgment unshaken by the cunning and tricky shanty-boater.

"Yas, suh!" the river-man grinned.

As Clumb and his discomfited motor-boat man went aboard the ferry, the shanty-boater returned into his own craft.

"Theh!" he said to his pals. "Old Clumb's plumb sure Columbiana an' that feller Caroost done that job. Good thing we towed up with 'Sour Pop.' Hit's jes' the way he said. I bet we can pull that pearl-buyer tonight. We ain't never bothered them pearl-buyers none. This here boat ain't big enough fer any real freight. Hit don't take much joolry o' that kind to make a load, though."

"Lawse!" Tid grinned. "Them two made that getaway slick! She held the wheel, an' he kicked over the starter."

"How'd they managed the rope?"

"Columbiana kicked hit off the cleat."

"Yo' 'low hit's safe to pull a job tonight—so soon?"

"On to that pearl-buyer——"

"But they'll all be nervous 'count of them pirates."

"We got to bait 'im," Tid explained. "They never was a buyer turned down a pearl 'count of nervousness yet. Lucky I got them pearls yet. They ain't much account, but I kin play off I expect they're worth about a thousand."

"Hit's seo!"

A little after dark they put the outboard motor on the skiff and drove up the river to land in Gas House Slough of Mendova and walked up to Tivoli Street, turned south and then turned again toward the river. Two stopped at the first corner, and Tid and Rooter went on down the block to a little brick and concrete building with a delivery alley along one side. They entered the building, and ten minutes later the other two strolled down and also entered.

In the back room a man with greatly distended jaws sat firmly bound in a chair. His eyes were eloquent gray-blue. Tid and Rooter were making a businesslike collection from the large, open safe in the room. Within five minutes the four turned out the lights, closed the doors and carefully locked them. They strolled past a policeman on Front Street and walked up to Gas House Slough, entered their skiff, dropped back to the County court landing and cut loose their shanty-boat.

Down the bend they counted their money, seven thousand six hundred and forty dollars. They examined their pearls of price and decided that they had about fifteen thousand dollars' worth, Old Britler having collected enough for several strings and matched six pairs of beautiful ear-drops.

They had played a bold game and won handily. They floated all night, playing poker with a five-cent ante and a twenty-five-cent limit—a rate that gave them excitement but did not leave them stranded as a big game would have done. They knew what a big game would do to them—that it would break them up and that probably they would fight before they were through.

"I tell you, boys," Red boasted, "we'll drap down to Vicksburg and go into N'Orleans, and there we'll have some fun, eh? We'll get shut of them pearls and slugs, an' we'll have fifteen thou', all right, and we'll get some new hats and pants and so on, an' what we won't do won't be do-able. No! Nobody can tell us how to do things!"

"Yeh!" Sunflower cried with delight. "I know what I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' to salt some of my money away, an' I'm goin' to live around an' maybe kind of git married er somethin'. An' I'll have a little place to live on so, 'f I got to git to scoutin', I'll have a place I kin go to an' settle down an' never say nothin' but what I'm one of them swell sports who lives out'n the country——"

"Believe me," Rooter grinned, "I'm goin' to circulate around. I'm going around to 'Frisco. I ain't be'n there sincet the earthquake, when they made me work—work like a darky—an' me with two thou' into my pockets I'd picked up around before they got to shootin' so promiscuous just if yo' was walkin' around and bendin' over ——"

"Let's stop into Thirty-Seven an' get

some of Tavell Love's Arkansaw Overflow, eh?" the fourth man suggested. "We kin git somethin' so's when we go drappin' down, scoutin' down the bends, we'll have sömethin' to do. I don't know nothin' harder to do 'n jes float down an' watchin' the banks. If yo' got some good liquor along, hit kind of passes the time; see?"

"Sure—that's right! We'll jes' have a drink aroun', an' we'll sort of float down nights an' tie up back in some'rs days!"

Thus they contrived to fall into the hands of Nemesis.

CHAPTER VI

THE RIVER ALWAYS DOES CUT UP

WITH their thirty-foot police patrol-launch speeding down the river at nearly twenty-five miles an hour, the soft-paw, James M. Caroost, and the river-girl, Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine, were fully occupied in steering it. Going at that rate, the boat slipped and slewed around, and only by quick, hard pulls on the wheel could Columbiana steer it properly. Caroost stood patiently beside her with his right wrist fastened to her left wrist by the handcuffs. When they had rounded the long bend below Mendova, on her order, he pulled the lever to cut out the extra motor, and they dropped back to the less exacting gait of ten or eleven miles an hour.

The soft-paw could not speak, and Columbiana's mind was too full of thoughts to make any remarks. Becoming fugitives from justice was the last idea that would have occurred to either of them, and now they had stolen the Mendova police-launch from under the very foot of Chief Clumb.

"Did you know who that shanty-boater was, talking to Chief Clumb?" she turned and demanded suddenly.

"No!" he shook his head. "Did you?"

"Of course, I knew him! One of those river-pirates, and the first time I eveh knew him to get to do anything—anything—kindly for anybody!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, didn't you notice? Clumb was watching that shanty-boat, and that gave us a chance—that shanty-boater did it on purpose! Helped us get away!"

"Helped us escape!" Caroost turned to look at her.

"Well, didn't he?"

"Why—yes—of course. But—bu——"

"Possibly you had moral scruples about his helping us get away?" she demanded.

"Why—you see—it's so—so unconventional—helping—ah—prisoners escape. I thought——"

"Who-all mout you be, stranger?" she drawled, her expression one of bewilderment and her eyes wondering and yet twinkling.

"James M. Caroost," he replied absently.

"I thought so—but I wasn't at all sure!" she said, turning to see whither she was steering, and then a minute later she continued, "One of my friends was arrested by Chief Clumb, once, up above here. He said as they came down to Mendova, chief opened some things he called emergency rations, and they had a regular feed. I'm hungry!"

"I am, too—awfully!" Caroost exclaimed. "I will get——"

He started, and the unaccustomed handcuffs brought him up short. He stared at the steel links, while Columbiana steered industriously. He looked from side to side helplessly. Sheepishly he returned and sat down. It occurred to him—it dawned on him at last—that their predicament had a number of wide-spread ramifications.

"For a man," she murmured at last, "I think you are a person of exceedingly trifling and no-account ingenuity."

"I—I have to have time to—ah—think!" he explained contritely. "Our family were, really, plodders——"

"You must have been astonished when you found yourself escaped from the—ah—authorities," she half-mocked him.

"Well—ye—yes; I recall that our dear ancestor, Jevone Caroost, did escape from Indians by the exercise of superior intelligence and—and ability to run."

"You're running true to form then, aren't you?"

"Eh—true to form?"

"Yes; you know when horse-races are run, horses are said to make about a certain speed under certain condition of training—according to their form, you know."

"Eh—of course. You—ah—are familiar with race-tracks?" he asked in obvious effort to restrain himself.

"They amuse me," she admitted. "I just

love the Louisville races—and in N'Orleans, too!"

He looked at her.

"Aren't you afraid—possibly you think I may contaminate you?" she smiled at him suddenly. "A sporting girl—you think?"

"I beg your pardon!" he hastened. "I didn't happen to have met any like you before."

"Never was attached to one like me before, then?"

"N-n-n—" he started, and then he threw his head back to laugh in an outburst, which he followed by a contrite, "I beg your pardon! It sounded—er—so humorous. Of course, I came down the river because——"

She gazed at him with hopeless admiration.

"Because of some untoward incident?" she suggested.

"Yes—you see," he burst forth, "there was a lady sang in our church, and she—and she——"

"I see—refrained from marrying you?" gently.

"Yes," he blinked, "a very lovely lady; her voice was beautiful, thrilling. Her mother promised she would marry me, and, of course, it seemed all settled. It was all settled, but she married a—married a garage-owner instead."

"And you didn't even own an automobile?"

"Oh, several——"

"And you could drive an automobile?"

"Oh my, yes!"

"I thought you started that motor as if you knew it—I was astonished at your facility. So you came down the river?"

"So I came down the river. I—I felt very badly, of course. They said—her mother, you know, and the rest—that down the river I would forget."

"And you forgot?" she asked, softly.

"Why—ye—largely. I've had to. Dear me! Life is so unexpected down here—events are so varied. My excuse was to find my dear old college professor——"

"Exactly!" she smiled. "Suppose you look in that tool-chest, there in the locker, and see if there isn't a file?"

"That's so!" he cried. "That's so—if we had a file——"

"You're so anxious to be separated from me?" she demanded.

"No!" he exclaimed after gazing at her for a full half-minute.

He sat back against the gunwale and made no motion toward the tool-chest. He sat stubbornly when she attempted to go to it. She was helpless. She discovered that, despite his light appearance, he was immovable.

"Please!" she exclaimed, at last.

Without a word he threw up the locker top, and there were trays of tools and, in cover slots, a score of assorted files. He drew a thin, fine blade with a saw-edge and had taken two or three cuts with it when he turned to her and said:

"This is a police-boat. Don't you suppose in those lockers? In that cabinet inside?"

"That's so!" she exclaimed. "Really, you are learning!"

Sure enough, hanging over a bar in a gun-cabinet were a score of pairs of handcuffs, ready for any police emergency. They found one pair that was exactly like their own, and its key clicked the lock. Their manacles fell from their wrists.

"Thank you!" she smiled.

"I shall never forget—" he hesitated—"our attachment!"

She tried not to smile, but she could not help it. One of her own birds had come flying home.

"What are we going to do?" she asked. "We'll change the boat's name!"

"They certainly would recognize—identify this boat!" he admitted. "I don't know—I am—I am not familiar with the river—not very——"

"But a callous gathers on your hand?" she queried.

"Eh? You mean—oh!" he laughed gaily. "I realize—I begin to understand. You know—people said so much about 'softpaws'—and I—and I——"

He turned up his palms, and gazed at the four lumps along the bases of each of his sets of four fingers.

"I am delighted!" he cried. "Isn't the Mississippi wonderful? And the *patois*—the dialect—the colloquialisms—are so amusing and so appropriate! I begin to like—I begin to love it!"

"It treated you mean at first?" she asked.

"I wouldn't say exactly that," he shook his head. "Not meanly but with—with a kind of discourtesy!"

She laughed.

"My hunger is not yet appeased," she added. "Won't you look for an emergency ration? We can not go down much farther. By this time they've telephoned and telegraphed our descriptions to N'Orleans. We don't dare pass Memphis in the daytime. We can run down Barnay Chute, though, and I reckon there's enough water to come across the bar at the head of Thirty-Seven; anyhow, there's a new cut across Centennial Island, and we'll lie in there till after dark and drop on down, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you'd rather not travel with a lady?"

SHE looked him in the eye with level gaze. In all his life he had never met quite that cold, gray stare. Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine had thought of things which he had not yet surmised. She had lived alone on the Mississippi for a number of years, and she was far from ignorant; she knew things which never were included in the sheltered life and circumscribed education of an ignorant up-the-bank man. She was a girl of the world, competent and adaptable; he was just a narrow, hapless townsman.

"I am sorry!" he exclaimed. "Of course—as you say! If you'll just land me up the bank here—anywhere!"

"You're—you're going to leave me—to get away as best I can?" she asked, and she had to turn her face away lest he see the twinkle in her eyes as she thought of being protected by the like of him.

He started. Bewildered and blanked by her sudden shift of view-point, he could only open his mouth and gaze helplessly at the sand-bar, the trees of a long bend, the willows and the narrow chute toward which they were heading.

"I don't know!" he whispered, wiping his arm across his forehead, where had gathered beads of sweat at the crisis of his predicament. "You—you are so much more familiar with—with affairs down here. I—I was never a fugitive before with a lady!"

She burst into a laugh, and he grinned ruefully. As she laughed, she steered the police-boat down the chute. She cut down the gas and as the boat slowed she ran it around a point and up into an old bayou. There, hidden behind young willows growing on a bar and in a pocket in a wilderness, clear of the mainland and surrounded by many islands, they threw over an anchor and came to rest.

It was nearly sunset, and Columbiana made haste to examine the emergency rations and found that the big, sheet-metal, porcelain-lined cupboard contained bread in waxed paper, smoked meats, canned goods, a bushel of potatoes, cans of flour and cornmeal and other ample supplies. Rapidly she spread out what she wanted. While she prepared to bake hot-bread, he acted to her orders and peeled potatoes and sliced smoked beef. She tried to find a coffee-pot but found, instead, a percolator.

He made the coffee. When it came on dark, they turned on the cabin light, pulled down the curtains and closed the door. They sat up to the table to dine. Out of the stores they had succeeded in making a delicious meal, including smoked-beef, sauce, hot bread, corn pone, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes and many other things.

"The police live in plumb comfort when they go shanty-boating, don't they?" Columbiana suggested.

It was, however, an intolerable position. They were both embarrassed. They had but touched the brim of their affair together. She had minded her own business, refrained from asking him any least question—but she just had to know now. Yet she hesitated to ask the questions.

"You seemed plumb surprized when Sheriff Dabonne told you those things were stolen?" she hinted.

"I was!" he admitted. "If I'd known—I couldn't imagine—you see, it was this way. I'd tied in up at the head of Island 35—and, first thing I knew, I was down in a big fog—I didn't know where."

"You'd anchored?"

"Yes. And then—then, while I was looking around, I saw four horrible monsters coming right up to my boat, swimming, and—and—well, I was greatly alarmed, and I went away in my skiff, and I bumped into that big house-boat, all full of sporting-goods."

"And I arrived just in time to be caught with you by Sheriff Dabonne?"

"Exactly, and I'm so sorry——"

"I'm not!"

He started and then gazed at her. She

did not meet his gaze. This was something different again. He could not guess what was in her mind. He realized, however, that for some reason she was not blaming him nor greatly disturbed by their predicament.

"I should not forgive myself if by my stupidity I had gotten you into this difficulty," he said slowly, "and if there is anything I can do—anything possible—I'll go back and explain to the chief—I'll take all the blame—anything!"

"Just to save me annoyance?" she asked.

"Exactly!"

"You weren't to blame," she told him. "It's just what Old Mississip' did. The river's cutting up all the time. It's got us into this scrape, and perhaps it'll get us out, but we can't depend on it. Of course, we can't keep this boat. There's something you could do——"

"I'll do it!" he declared.

"It's down below, on Island 37. There's a blind-tiger there—a Black-and-Tan dive, if you know what that is?"

"No," he shook his head.

"They sell whisky there and beer; all the disreputable men and women off the river, and around, go there. It's a regular shack settlement on the island and a lot of shanty-boats. Nobody decent ever goes there, except—except fugitives from justice. I'd die before I'd go there—but——"

"I might—I might find somebody there who——"

"We've got to have another boat—two boats. Skiffs. One for you—one for me—of course! And——"

"Of course—I'll go. You are the captain!"

"Thank you!" she replied, not without feeling.

His eyes turned to a clothing-cabinet or locker part way up the cabin at the foot of the sleeping-car bunks. He walked over and looked at the contents. He smiled as he found uniforms of several of the water-front policemen.

"I'll go down to those shacks in style!" he told her, drawing the curtains.

In a few minutes he emerged. He was a policeman, from the jaunty lieutenant cap down to the oil-polished shoes on his feet. She stared at him.

"You—you wouldn't go there in that—that uniform!" she gasped. "Why, they'll shoot you—dead!"

"I deserve to be shot," he replied. "This is the police-boat, and it's been seen—a boat came down this chute ahead of us. They'd be sure I was a detective if I went in there in plain clothes. If I go there in this—and tell my business, why perhaps——"

An exclamation of astonishment broke from her lips.

"Really—you are bright!" she cried. "That is the thing to do!"

With side-lights burning and the search-light picking their way, they ran down to the rear of Island 37 and rounded up to the stern of a big boat there. The side of the board carried the weather-beaten inscription—

SACRED CONCERTS, THE LOTUS!

Dancing and music ceased within a half-minute after the police-boat appeared, and there was a scampering of feet over the bow and up the bank. With line in hand, Caroost jumped to the big cabin-boat stern and threw a hitch on a timber-head. He stood there, fully revealed in the stern light of the concert-boat. He walked into the cabin and out on to the dancing-floor.

Columbiana watched him with catching breath. She saw that his shoulders squared, that he stepped upon the balls of his feet, his heels raised like an anxious bear. He was going into a den, the like of which he had never seen, but she noticed what she had not seen before—that both of his outside coat pockets sagged heavily, though his hands were not in them but on the protruding butts of two police automatics.

SHE could see the men and women crowding back against the walls of the cabin. There were three or four whom she knew, "Big Sue," for example, and "Pete the Gunman" and two or three trappers and market-hunters whom she did not know by name. There was a blue-eyed yellow girl and a little, smart-Alec white man with a face like a cat, who walked from the far side and, smirking, greeted the newcomer in a policeman's dress uniform.

"Who yo'-all 'low to git, Lieutenant?" the little man demanded. "My name's Tavell Love, and I'm superintendent here."

"I don't happen to want to get any man," Caroost replied. "I want two good skiffs, clinker-built and sixteen or eighteen feet long. I want them right, too, and good oars. If you've got an outboard motor, so much the better."

"Then—then yo' ain't afteh nobody?"

"If I was, I'd come down like a river-rat, and I'd work like a snake, and I'd be a plain-clothes man!" Caroost retorted.

"Sho! Yas, suh! We don't aim to interfere with nobody that don't bother us, er ouh friends!" the little wretch grimaced, and, turning to a gingerbread darkey leaning against the bow door jamb, he ordered, "theh's them two skifts down by Palura's yacht. One's clinker-built, but one's laid smooth—a narrow-strip boat, Lieutenant?"

"Tight?"

"Yassuh, theh's both varnished boats, suh. One's twenty-foot long, an' hits got a two-hoss motor, suh——"

"Good! I'll go down and look at them."

The three walked down the bank to the "yacht," which was a whisky-running motor-boat. There, in an eddy beside a square timber float, were several skiffs. With a flash Caroost looked them over. The boats the little man pointed out were the best ones there.

"How much, old man?" Caroost asked.

"Nothing, suh!"

"What! Why, I'm willing to pay——"

"Yas, suh—course! I know that; I know every —— bull in Mendova, too—an' yo' ain't one of them. Yo' shore come hit dandy on to 'Pig Foot' Clumb—yo'n that gal, Columbiana. Hit'd be a favor to me, though—if—if——"

"If what?"

"If yo' 'n' her'd leave that police-launch down by Old River Mouth landing—she knows where hit is. I'd shore like to telephone Pig Foot I got hisn's boat to return hit as a special 'commodation to him!"

"Oh!" Caroost exclaimed astonished.

"Yo' throwed a good bluff, old sport!" the man cackled. "But hit wa'n't necessary; any time yo' git to scoutin', drap in hyar, an' we'll take cyar of yo', yassuh—an' if that gal—if she wants to hide out hyar—why——"

"We'll go up and talk to her!" Caroost hastened to say.

"You kin!" the man grimaced. "I done hit onct; I was six weeks into Memphis Hospital, an' my side's tender, yet, where the bullet went. Lawse! She ain't—she's friendly with yo'-all, suh?"

"She's captain!" Caroost answered.

"She sent yo' in in that uniform?"

"It was my idea—coming down in the police-boat—I didn't want anybody to think I was a plain-clothes man——"

"Sho! Didn't yo'-all wear big round specs?"

"For a time—yes!"

"An' they said yo' was a soft-paw—say! Go get some extra gasoline an' that outboard, Tinkle!"

The gingerbread turned and hurried away.

"Say, sport!" the man lowered his voice. "I could use you—down b'low! Yo'-all want to tie up for a job?"

"Not with a lady on my hands."

"That's so—any other lady, course—but—um-m; Columbiana's awful particular—yas, suh!"

Five minutes later with two skiffs alongside the police-patrol dropped down the Old River behind Island 37, and Columbiana laughed when she heard the plan of the little man.

"He's bad, that scoundrel!" she said. "I met him onct."

"He said he knew you."

Her eyes narrowed as she looked down the search-light beam.

"Yes; he helped establish my reputation down this way," she admitted. "Most anywhere else in the world a lady with a reputation lots of times deserves it but don't like it. But down this way a reputation's useful and necessary—and I have one."

They anchored in the Old River Mouth landing eddy. She picked supplies and outfit for the skiffs from the lavish stock on the police-boat, including waterproof blankets, swing cots and the balloon canvas tents and flies—used when the chief went turkey-hunting or hounding a fugitive. She took her pick, too, of the boat's firearms, and Caroost took his—and his discrimination pleased her fancy. He took, too, a bunch of handcuffs.

"What for?" she asked.

"There are some scoundrels who scared me," he answered simply. "And I have a grudge!"

Then they abandoned the police-patrol.

CHAPTER VII

CAROOST SEIZES EVIDENCE OF HIS INNOCENCE

THE shanty-boat load of sporting-goods which had been carried from the Duck and Deer was brought to Mendova by the gasoline-packet *Bridle*, and a gang of negro roustabouts were employed to carry the stuff back up to the Front Street store. Two clerks and the proprietor spent some time filling up the shelves and cases which had been so thoroughly evacuated.

The shanty-boat, which was fifty feet long, was claimed within three days by a man from up on the Ohio River, who had missed it from its landing between two days. Having identified it, proved ownership and engaged a tow-up in a barge fleet, he returned it to his own berth.

Adjustments were made with regard to other shanty-boats which had gone down the river on that night of fog. River-people, among themselves, looked out upon the placid current, wishing that they could swear, but not daring to, for fear the Mississippi would hear them. No less than three shanty-boat towns had gone afloat that night, besides half a hundred boats that had been moored along banks, bars, towheads and islands, from fifteen or twenty miles above Mendova to below town.

It could happen, of course, because it had happened. The memory of that weird, prolonged, chilling laughter could not be eradicated; that was as tangible and important as the mere going adrift had been. It really meant more in the minds of those who had heard it.

Word that Columbiana and a sport, or a soft-paw, had been arrested in a fifty-foot Point Pleasant-built shanty-boat with all the Duck and Deer stock on board was another fine bit of live gossip. Among some of the women, the fact that Columbiana had always held herself aloof and refused to marry any man and had shot no less than three persistent admirers—all easy, and no one fatally—they resented as a criticism on their own conduct and ideas.

Columbiana had always held her head high, daytimes, anyhow, and now—she was just getting what was coming to her for being that kind of a girl, river-pirating along, and caught at last. Of course, river-ladies like Mrs. Mahna, Mrs. Young, Mrs. Haney and old-timers of discretion and experience understood Columbiana's viewpoint and stood up for her.

"Jes' 'cause she don't have no man a-hangin' around ain't no sign she ain't no regard for 'pearances!" Mrs. Mahna declared. "Likely she's got reasons. Perhaps some feller she likes is gone off some'rs scouting er is into jail er something like that, an' she's jes' waitin' on him. She ain't obliged to tell her business, is she? Course, she ain't. Them O'Bines never was no hand to talk their own business——"

"Well, how does she live?" Mrs. Dapnell demanded. "What she got to live on if she ain't what she says she ain't and if she ain't a river-rat pirate like some others, I'd like to know!"

"She's educated, Columbiana is!" Mrs. Mahna retorted. "Take a man er lady that's eddicated, an' they don't have to work. All they got to do is think, and they make money same's the rest of us does lifting our daylights out lugging nets er drift logs er—er anything!"

The capture of Columbiana and the soft-paw, who was now believed to be a regular old sport hiding behind a pair of big round specs, was an almost unanswerable indictment of Columbiana, at least.

"If she ain't one of them pirates, what is she?" Mrs. Dapnell demanded.

"How comes hit yo' drapped down forty mile into that fog, an' you 'lowed to lie there above Thirty-Four Towhead till it come cold?" Mrs. Haney demanded.

"That's ole Mississip'—the dad——"

"Couldn't Ole Mississip' git Columbiana into that boat, somehow?" Mrs. Mahna asked tartly.

"Course——"

"That's hit! Course! Sho!"

"Gittin' caught with the goods neveh made no one a pirate, 'thout they was circumstantial evidence," Mrs. Drost explained elaborately. "Why, one time me 'n' my husband that used to was—le's see; hit were Mr. Jacklin' or Mr. Reel, I fergits which—found fo' thousand dollars up by Buf'lo Island. Hue-e! Wa'n't we rich! Well, we took to spendin' hit along same's anybody would, an' next we knowed we was right into U. S. court an' 'cused of counterfeitin'.

"Was we counterfeiters? Nope! We never got no good out 'n that money, to speak of. They took—I 'member, now, hit were Mr. Cumstark I was married to then—all we had left, exceptin' some into a tin can they didn't find. We bought chickens an' such stuff and pigs an' hides off'n darkeys, after that; so, really, we didn't git to lose so much as we mout of. But theh they had us 'cused of counterfeitin'—shucks!

"S'posen Columbiana did have them things? Likely she'd jes' stopped in theh to say howdy to that black-bow-specked feller what laid off to be a soft-paw an' fooled everybody! Sho! I ain't no faith in nobody that acts iggerant; mebby they is iggerant, an' mebby they's jes' reg'lar pirates. But yo' take a smart Alec, an' yo' know he's iggerant, because he plays smarty."

Thus they discussed, professed and recorded during the interim of the capture and escape of Columbiana and that sporting soft-paw, Caroost. When the river-people learned of or witnessed the escape of the two while handcuffed together in the Mendova police patrol-boat, leaving Chief Clumb standing up the bank swearing through the cadences of a complete repertoire of profanity, there was great joy. Pig-Foot Clumb always was acting so superior to shanty-boaters; and then, right on top of the escape, the burglary and the excitement arrived the gagging and binding of Old Britler in his little pearl, baroque and shell headquarters there in Mendova!

That was rubbing it into Clumb! At the same time river-people couldn't be sure whether the theft was by their own pirates or some of those long-riding or automobile fellows who had lately begun to appear far and wide as claimants for attention of those on the mid-line between Up-the-Bankers and regular river-pirates. However honest a river-man or lady might be, he could not refrain from a genuine interest in the doings of the people who might drop in any day, all unbeknownst, and have dinner at their own very tables, or perhaps merely tie in at the same eddy or sand-bar.

In any event, they enjoyed the embarrassment manifested by Chief Clumb and the Mendova Chamber of Commerce and all that kind of people when they chipped in and offered five thousand dollars reward for the capture and conviction of the raiders who dared tie up and rob, first a famous sporting-goods store and then a leading merchant, a dealer in pearls and baroques and buttonshells.

It was bad enough to have a ratio of one hundred and thirteen killings to the one hundred thousand population, but, when it came to having four tons of stock and twenty-five thousand dollars in pearls stolen one night right after the other—that was too serious to go unresolved and without resolution.

Tavell Love and Tinkle, proprietor of the Island 37 resort, took the police patrol-boat, *Dareall*, up to Mendova and reported it by the wharf-boat telephone to police headquarters. Clumb came down in the sky-blue, gold-trimmed police automobile and looked the boat over with rueful dissatisfaction. It wasn't because some of the contents were gone—taxation would pay for that—but because the two culprits were not in it.

"Where'd you get it?" Clumb grumbled.

"Down in the big cut-off, Chief——"

"Anybody into it?"

"No—it just floated down, swinging into the eddies. I was out duck-shooting, and I saw it swing by, and I 'lowed perhaps yo'd like hit——"

"Course, Tavell! But—" Clumb stared at him.

"Yo' ain't nothin' on me now, Chief!" Tavell declared. "Not sincet that feller come down with——"

"Didn't see them two prisoners?"

"Didn't see anybody, Chief. Who was they?"

"Why—a white girl name of Columbiana O'Bine, and a fellow name of Caroost. They robbed the Duck and Deer——"

"I heard somebody talking about that!" Tavell exclaimed. "Somebody said——"

"Aw, come off! Yo' know all about hit! What ails me is it took 'leven rousters two-three hours to pack that stuff back up to the store, an' them two—feller and a girl—packed hit all down to the shanty-boat in about an hour."

"When pirates has a job, they works fast," Tavell declared.

"What you heard about that Britler business, Love?"

"Not a word!" the islander shook his head.

"You're lying!"

"Nope, hope to die, not! That wa'n't no river job; hit were up the bank. I don't know anybody that 'd have the nerve to do hit. How much did they get?"

"Pearls and slugs Britler paid eighteen thousand seven hundred and sixty dollars for and more 'n seven thousand dollars cash."

"Hit were a nice tidy little haul, Chief."

"The —— of it is, I got to get 'em back er lose my job!" Clumb choked.

"Wh-a-at?"

"That's right!"

Tavell Love stared out across the Mississippi.

"Reckon yo'-all could he'p a feller? I ain't been mean—you know that!" Clumb reminded him.

"Who'd get your job?" Love demanded practically.

"Dolend!"

"What! Why——"

"That's right; I wouldn't mind gettin' dumped so much if it wa'n't for havin' a dadblasted reformer come in. He'd sure raise——"

"I ain't heard nothin', Chief—but if I should——"

TAVELL went on down the river in a little runabout he had towed up behind the patrol-boat. He was perturbed by the prospect. If they put in Dolend, Mendova would be dead; the State would be dead; the Mississippi River would be dead; there wouldn't be anything doing anywhere. The next he knew, they'd enforce the law against blind-tigers on river islands; the Mississippi would go dry. He couldn't think of any calamity to equal the thought of the Mississippi River going dry.

When he arrived at Thirty-Seven, he asked around about that job on Old Britler. Gossip said that it was a river job, but no one knew who had done it. The money hadn't showed up yet. Tid, Rooter and two others of the Turtles had just dropped in, and they told him they didn't know anything about it.

"You see how it is, boys," Tavell Love declared, "if they dump Clumb out, that'll bust up Mendova. You know how it is down in Memphis now—all dried up so they've begun to tell how extravagant people is about drinking so much coffee, and it's bad for the nerves. Well, now 'f Mendova——"

"I don't cyar if old Clumb gits his and they's forty of them reform cops put in," Red Tid sniffed. "I don't have to ast any man fer a drink. I come from the mountangs, an' I can make mine, an' I'll do it but what I have my liquor. It don't do no man any good, goin' without his liquor. Why, what fun is there in this world if a man don't have liquor? Why, that's all the real fun they is!"

"But look't, Tid! Ev'rybody ain't sit'yated the way you be! Take them that cyan't make their own liquor—what'll they do?"

"They's iggerant, an' I never worry none about iggerants," Tid jerked his head. "Les' have some more liquor, boys, before we gits dried up!"

Tavell Love, afraid of Mendova's going dry and being reformed and everybody's pleasure dried at the fountain-head, was poor company for them. They spent a drink around for everybody and then announced their intention to drop on down the Old River and out into the Mississippi.

"You boys got lots of money!" Love declared suspiciously.

"We's got business to 'tend to," Tid declared. "We needed a little money to kind of prepare for it."

"I bet you got a sawmill pay-job on hand?" Tavell hinted.

"If we have, likely yo'll see the envelopes' insides," Tid grinned, and they parted, the pirates in their pretty little red shanty-boat.

However, they took six jugs full of Arkansaw Bottom Overflow with them, and, when they reached the Mississippi, they didn't care much which way the boat floated.

They had gone down for thirty-six hours when in the dusk a skiff drew near them. The cabin-boat was going around in an eddy and had been for an hour or more. The skiff drew out of a little chute-bay and ran alongside. Its occupant stealthily climbed aboard and turned a flashlight into the interior, where he saw the pirates sprawled on the floor. The light confirmed a suspicion.

"Why, this is my boat!" the skiffman muttered softly. "I think I'll take possession!"

It was Caroost, fugitive from justice, ex-soft-paw, and learning still. He climbed aboard and gently slipped handcuffs upon all the wrists of the band of pirates. Then he dragged them out on the bow deck.

Then Caroost proceeded to sweep out the boat and pick it up. He threw overboard several empty jugs, but inherited sense of economy prevented him from throwing overboard the full jugs. He searched through the boat and found many of his own things intact, except the food supply. That had been depleted, and sundry unfamiliar meat lumps and the like substituted.

As he swept by lamplight, he saw something roll along the floor, and, picking it up, he saw by lamplight that it was a pearl. It was a beautiful pink pearl. Its size made him wonder if it wasn't artificial. A closer search revealed a pail full of little envelopes, each marked with figures, and he recognized the contents of the envelopes as baroques.

He went out and searched the clothes of the pirates and discovered that he had been idiotic. Each pirate had one or two automatic pistols and ammunition. Moreover, they all had money-belts and in the neighborhood of one thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars in each belt. Gazing at one of the faces, its familiarity struck Caroost as remarkable; that, and the fact of the boat being his, and the certainty that four horrid water-monsters had come through the fog to alarm and dismay him—surely, these were the monsters!

The money and additional pearls from their garments stirred Caroost's mind to diverse ideas. He brought out the bottle of forty per cent. ammonia which he had for cleansing purposes and, dragging one of the pirates into the cabin, proceeded to revive him.

The pirate was Sunflower, the least of the four. Sunflower came out of his stupor slowly as from a bad dream.

"We got ernough, boys!" he whimpered. "I'm all wore out, totin' this stuff! Lawse! We couldn't sell no more rifles er shotguns! Look't—we got fo' hundred automatics already—aw, come on, boys! Les' quit while the quittin's good. I'm tired! Yeh—aw—what's the ust of the safe? They ain' no money into hit! They don't leave no money into a safe. Come on!"

Caroost listened with quickened mind. So these were the men who had loaded up that big house-boat with firearms. He plied the half-conscious wretch with ammonia and with questions. Sunflower gave up, told all about the raid on the Mendova Duck and Deer sporting-goods store, and Caroost listened with gratitude and attentiveness. He wrote down the confession, and Sunflower signed it, "Jerry Miskole, alias Druley Frane."

Next Caroost partly revived Rooter, and Rooter boasted of his prowess and swore that, when he stole, he stole clean. Under Caroost's questioning, he told the story of robbing Old Britler, and he signed the paper. Red came partly to with a desire to fight, but Caroost managed him psychologically, and Red confirmed the stories of his unfortunate piratical mates—and signed the confession. The fourth man, when Caroost went out to find him, was gone, handcuffs and all. Caroost was sorry he hadn't chained him to the cleat, but at the same time it was a lesson.

He chained the three who remained, elbow in elbow and from cleat to cleat on the stern. Then he knew what he had to do.

"This clears Columbiana's reputation," he exclaimed gratefully. "It was my life's work and necessity to clear her reputation! My land! It wouldn't do to let an innocent girl like her suffer under that strain! I wish she were here to help me think what to do about this. My gracious! These men must be awful bad men, robbing and burglarizing the way they tell about!"

Caroost, innocent and with the proof and evidence of his innocence, with substitutes for court action, too, knew of but one way of settling the affair. He studied the maps and found that he was still somewhere above Memphis. Memphis, naturally, would be the place to go to with the prisoners, as he had no power with which to buck the current up to Mendova.

Accordingly, he pulled out into the current and floated down. Memphis was just below the second bend where he could see the yellow haze of the sky-reflections. He landed at the Mud Bar and, sitting guard, waited for day.

CHAPTER VIII

"GOOD OLD KEKO—HA-HA-HA-HA-A! POOR OLD PONY BOY!"

COLUMBIANA parted from James Caroost for appearances' sake, with regret. It was bad enough to be caught with him and taken to Mendova on the charge of burglary, and, no doubt, her escape with him—and even handcuffed to him—would make an awful lot of talk down the Mississippi River, where everybody does talk so much—often not having anything else to do for days and weeks at a time but talk.

But she knew people wouldn't think so much of it if she quit him at the first opportunity. At the same time, when she had sent him away he had gone under protest until she told him frankly that it wasn't proper for her to go wandering down the Mississippi all alone with a man, even with him. Then he had suggested—

"But—but we could—why, Columbiana, we could get married!"

The idea was such a shock and had come so suddenly that she had flared up angrily at him and told him what was what.

"What gave you the idea you had a right, or even permission, to propose to me—any such thing as that?" she had demanded, and she had said to him more than that with indignant, thoughtless tongue, asking, "Where could we go to get married? You know, if we went anywhere, they'd arrest us. You expected me to say yes—and then—and then you'd thought of that—and—and——"

Caroost had been abashed, humbled and rendered speechless. She knew he hadn't thought anything of the kind, but she had said it the way she was always saying things to men who had pretended they liked her—but she knew there was no pretense about Caroost. He wasn't much, yet, but she knew that she could have made quite a man of him; he had developed so fast in so short a time and had been so respectful and all that.

Sitting in her skiff with her chin on her hand and her elbow on her knee, she knew that she had really been angry not at him but at the condition of affairs which prohibited her going with the man she really wanted to marry, because he was wanted and she was wanted for burglary. And justices of peace or mayors or anybody doing marrying, not to mention clerks making out licenses, would have grabbed them and yelled for the police. Any Up-the-Banker would sell his soul for one hundred dollars, let alone the five thousand dollars reward for their arrest, which they had heard about at Thirty-Seven.

Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine was more indignant, less resourceful and sorrier than she had ever been since she left her father's store-boat up on the Ohio to live on her inheritance from her grandmother on her mother's side. She knew now that she had been waiting nine years, since she was sixteen, for this young man—and now she couldn't be his wife, because they'd both be arrested and sent to jail for years and years. She looked with asperity around her at the Mississippi; she hated it, but it was the life for her, especially now when she had to go in the night and do her shopping where she wasn't known.

She dropped down to Memphis, two days later, and landed in Ash Slough, where she had some friends who would treat her right, Mrs. Haney, for example, if she were there—and she was. Mrs. Haney said it was lucky Columbiana never had had any use for Memphis, and, if she would put on some other clothes, longer skirts and so on, no policeman up-town would ever recognize her. The newspapers said that Columbiana's boat was up at Mendova, waiting to be claimed, and if it wasn't claimed soon somebody would buy it and the money would be put in the hospital and police-pension funds.

Columbiana and Mrs. Haney went up-town, and the girl bought some clothes, which she needed. Then they went to the moving-picture second show and had a real good time together. They had such a good time, that Columbiana determined to spend several evenings up-town, trying to forget in the turmoil and excitement of town the disappointment of her life and the necessity that had occasioned it.

She even went up-town the next morning about nine o'clock, wearing a veil, a dark blue skirt, a white shirtwaist and a blue jacket so that she wouldn't attract attention and look like the brown-suited, tailor-made girl advertised by the Mendova chief.

She strolled along North Main Street, down-town, to the business section, and she saw ahead of her a crowd of people which was increasing. In the lead of the crowd she saw and soon recognized several old river-acquaintances of hers. There were Red Tip and Rooter and Sunflower. They were linked arm in arm, and their wrists were handcuffed each to each. On their faces was a look of intense and disgusted disappointment and surprize. Behind them stalked, of all men, James M. Caroost.

Caroost had a tall, broad policeman beside him, a man of the name of Haddam, who gained the applause of hosts because he just naturally killed up "Wild River Bill," who had grown proud as he grew wild. Haddam kept his eye on Caroost, who was the only one loose of the river-men in the group.

Columbiana choked down a sob. They had caught Caroost. She followed around to police headquarters, saw the fated four enter the Gates of Hades, and then she faded. She hurried to Ash Slough and wept in the pillows of Mrs. Haney's fourteen-dollar-and-ninety-cent brass bedstead, which she bought in St. Louis the time she fitted out the little blue poplar-boat with the asphalt cementing.

"I'll go up-town and find out if there's anything anybody can do," Mrs. Haney said, and right after dinner she went up-town.

She was gone three hours, and she returned with the first and second editions of the *Battle-Ax*.

"Well, I declare!" she cried to Columbiana, showing her the seven-column headings. "Look't!"

Columbiana, drying her tears, read:

> **Sportsman Wins the Mendova $5,000 Reward, and Clears His Own Good Name of False Charges due to Suspicious Circumstances; Anxious Only To Find Columbiana Muscatine O'Bine, Fellow Victim of Circumstantial Evidence and Heroine of Sensational Escape in Chief Clumb's Motor-Boat Patrol.**

Columbiana read, rising to her feet as the news startled her to surprize and excited delight.

"Now look't!" Mrs. Haney cried triumphantly.

Columbiana turned to the second edition of the *Battle-Ax* and saw the special, extra important news, enclosed in a "box."

> TAKES OUT A MARRIAGE LICENSE!

She read with bewildered doubt. Just then the cabin-boat door opened, and Mrs. Haney stepped to one side to avoid the rush.

"Oh, it's all right, Columbiana!" a deep voice exclaimed. "I fixed it. We're all clear, and anybody'll marry us and never say a word——"

Columbiana's lips parted and fire appeared in her eyes, but just then she remembered how a few hasty words and a tart remark had disturbed the Ohio River soft-paw—as regards some things—and sent him away into the dark river-night when she didn't mean anything at all. Accordingly, she curbed her tongue and turned her lips to the stalwart who had come to claim her—now that they were no longer fugitives from justice.

* * *

THE early Autumn night was at hand. The cabin of the shanty-boat had been too small and close for the exuberant feelings of the two. They went out into the open, where the dark river was rolling by and the city lights were flaring on to make a yellow glow in the gloom.

They were speechless—and at that moment the silence was broken by a long-drawn laugh. Caroost started and Columbiana uttered a low exclamation. Just down below the mouth of Wolf River some one was going by. He was crying out clearly audible phrases:

"Good old Keko—ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-a! Poor Old Pony Boy!"

"Why—that's—that's our yell! I went to Keko College!" Caroost cried. "Poor Old Pony Boy—that's the man I've come down the river to find—my old professor in mathematics—I had about given him up! Excuse me a little while!"

He scurried away. He was gone but an hour. In the interval he raced to the river-police wharf-boat, and with a lieutenant and the engineer he overtook the mad skiffman whose laughter had thrilled the river-people and established a tradition.

"Poor Old Pony Boy!" Caroost explained to Columbiana on his return, when he found her inclined to resent his hasty departure. "Overwork and underpay got him going. Now he'll be taken care of back home, and you and I'll finish this trip to N'Orleans together, eh girl?"

"Well, probably!" she admitted.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ANOTHER inquiry for the "gun cranks." Who can tell our comrade about the old gunsmith, H. Pratt?

Belvidere, N. Y.

Who can tell me anything about an old-time gunsmith who made very fine flint-lock rifles and marked them "H. Pratt"? Would like to know where and when he lived.—C. E. WHITCOMB.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, E. S. Pladwell rises and introduces himself. Though we have had stories from him before the one in this issue, his stepping forward has been delayed till now.

Oreana, Nevada.

I was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, Oct. 9, 1892. The only breaks in the continuity of my existence since then occurred when I stopped a quick-breaking in-shoot with my solar plexus, and again when I ducked into a right hook and had my nose pushed across to a painful position under my right eye.

NATURALLY, having passed the greater part of my life in a cattle country, I have seen branding-irons smoke and heard the hoarse bellows of calves put under the knife and hot iron ever since I can remember. I have seen horses, with the fear of the wild captured thing in their eyes, struggling against the ropes, and have seen them go into the air under the terrifying saddle and rider. Though personally (the demands of truth force me to an unwilling confession) I am no better rider than the imaginary *Spike Ellis* in "The Silver Saddle," I have a pretty thorough first-hand knowledge of the thrills incidental to the mounting of a cayuse. I also know what it is to lose step with him, fall a jump behind, reach for leather, and grab two handfuls of sand or bunch grass—or anything that might happen to constitute the earth formation in that vicinity.

I GOT through high school at Baker, Oregon, and had my fling at scholastic athletics, also long-winded old Cicero and that brain-staggering invention of Euclid called geometry. I attended the University of Oregon for a year and a half before deciding that I knew enough to make the old world sit up and take notice of me. Then I quit school and got married, and soon, like George Ade fastened my fraternity pin on my undershirt and admitted to myself that there were several things that had not come thoroughly under my notice.

AT VARIOUS times I have done other things besides ranch, go to school and wonder how O. Henry and Jack London could get so much kick from plain facts. I worked for a while with a topographical engineering party, and with a railroad engineering party. I bucked wood for a donkey at a big lumber camp near Kelso, Washington. I mucked for two weeks with a railroad construction gang, and though I then had plenty of that way of earning an honest living, I saw more disillusioning facts in the every-day events of those two weeks than a year at college could build up.

One incident in particular convinced me that the Mexicans might under certain conditions be hard to beat. It was one morning at breakfast. A big American and a little Greaser got into a senseless dispute about the passing of a plate of bread. The Mexican slashed out with a knife and laid the big fellow's face open. His opponent caught up a gallon-capacity granite-ware pitcher of condensed milk by the handle and tried to beat off the Mexican's head. All he did, however, was to spoil his appetite. The Mexican worked that day. The other called for his time and left the camp so as not to furnish more temptation for that knife.

I SOLD enlarged pictures in Oregon and California, and quit because I couldn't lie convincingly enough to satisfy my own conscience, though I was doing fairly well with the "gullible public." I have never ridden the rods, but have made several hundred miles on top and on the blinds. If any one doubts that clothes don't make the man, let him get his coat turned wrong side out (to keep the conventional exterior of it clean) and his eyes rimmed with coal smoke, and look from the rock bottom up into our social order.

I have mucked a good many thousand dollars' worth of ore for various mining companies. One night, on the graveyard shift in an incline shaft, I stepped back to roll a smoke. Three seconds afterward a ton of rhyolite fell out of the hanging wall and crashed down on the spot I had recently occupied. The edge of the cave-in caught the machine man's leg. I lifted a few boulders off his foot. He looked up and grinned. "Uncle Sam came —— near losing a good soldier," he said.

IT IS needless to say that my unconventional and floating-laborer activities were confined to my pre-nuptial days. Since Dec. 19, 1914, I have been rather unflaggingly busy trying to get by. It was partly through a desire to escape the menace of the muck stick (shovel being used symbolically for all manner of tools designed for the use of those of us who haven't both hands full of the Top Rung), and partly due to an ardent desire I have always had to learn to tell a good story well, that I began trying my hand at writing a few months ago.

I have felt humble when reading in the "Camp-Fire" of men who have lived more in a year than I have in ten. And I have felt humble while talking with men over real camp-fires whose experiences dwarf my pitiable ones to kindergarten affairs in comparison. But I must admit, with a trace of shame, that my "ardent desire" aforementioned always appears, corrupting my humbleness, which has been divinely commended, with covetousness, which is condemned. I covet that man's experience and think, if I had seen so much, felt so keenly, read so deeply in the "open books of life and death," what glorious tales could I tell! And yet, strange to say, I often doubt if I should endanger O. Henry's place in the story world, even if I had seen the Klondike stampede—E. S. PLADWELL.

IT HAS frequently been suggested that our Camp-Fire should have a simple emblem or badge whereby we might know one another when we met. Finally I brought up the matter at a recent meeting, but presented the two objections that it might be taken advantage of by dead-beats and that it might be taken by some as a cheap attempt to advertise the magazine.

Quite a few of you have written endorsing the idea and objecting to the obligations. I suppose the first one can be dropped. After all, the badge would merely indicate that its wearer was a member of our Camp-Fire and would carry with it no obligations to any other member. Merely a sign, so that if two members, strangers to each other, met in some far place they could use their own judgment about getting acquainted but would at least know that there was a common ground between them.

The second objection is, I think, removed by the following suggestion from a comrade who was serving on a Medical Advisory Board when he wrote:

White Plains.

I am detailed temporarily at the above board—rotten old clerical work, Uncle Sammy declaring in his superior wisdom that I am not qualified to wrestle with our Germanic neighbors across the water.

THE idea about the badge stuff certainly should go through. You wanted suggestions as to what it should be. Here's an idea. Old stuff, nothing original about it, but it's a plain sort of a badge and we'd all know what it meant. Here you are:

A	D	V	E	N	T	U	R	E
1	4	22	5	14	20	21	18	5

Taking each letter in the alphabet and numbering it you get the above. Now add all together, making a total of 140 in all, and use this number for the badge emblem. Have the pin small.

Let me know what you think of this, will you?—PRIV. JACK HYATT, JR.

Yes, it does the work. Only, instead of using the word "Adventure," why not use the word "Camp-Fire"?

C	A	M	P	F	I	R	E
3	1	13	16	6	9	18	5

Added, these figures gave 71 as the emblem. Nothing but the number 71 would appear on the button—a small, neat, well-finished button in inconspicuous colors. No advertisement about it. Those who were members of our Camp-Fire would know what it means; those who were not would know nothing.

The button would, of course, be issued to any member of Camp-Fire and any one is a member who wishes to be. A charge would be made to cover manufacturing cost and postage. I think I'll go ahead and order a limited number, letting you know when they're ready for delivery.

THE Fifth Liberty Loan is about due. Here's what one comrade did on previous Liberty Loans. How many of us are as good Americans as he?

San Francisco, California.

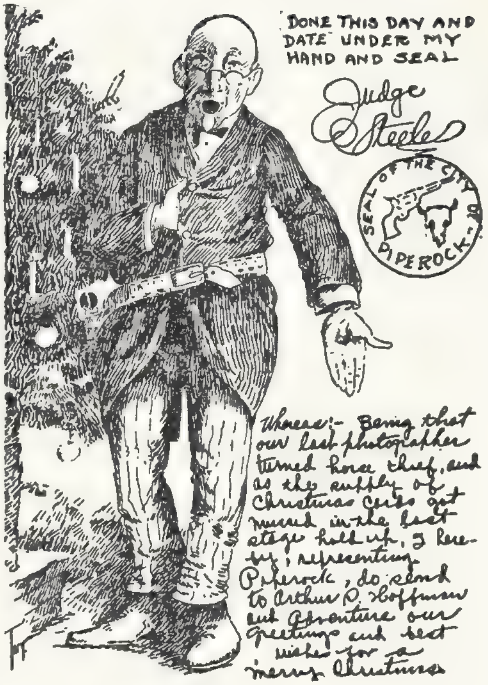
Please put my name on your list for Democracy.

Been a hobo, sailor, soldier, business man, horse owner, stevedore, laborer, socialist, I. W. W., R. R. policeman, captain of ex-Army and Navy men, sent or helped to send over 300 "over there." Two of them decorated by the French Government.

Took your advice; bought 2d and 3d issue of Liberty Bonds. Compelled to live in a fifteen-cent house to do it, and sure made four others in the same house get them.

Started young boys and girls with Thrift Stamps. Started children with War Gardens.—J. JUNEMAN.

PIPEROCK again sent Christmas greeting to *Adventure* through the kind offices of W. C. Tuttle, ex-cartoonist and non-exteller of tales that make us laugh. This time it's *Judge Steele* that delivers the greeting.


DONE THIS DAY AND DATE UNDER MY HAND AND SEAL
Judge Steele
SEAL OF THE CITY OF PIPEROCK
Whereas:- Being that our last photographer turned horse thief, and as the supply of Christmas cards got mussed in the last stage hold up, I here-by, representing Piperock, do send to Arthur S. Hoffman and Adventure our greetings and best wishes for a merry Christmas

Guns Again

SOME more about guns. It will take some time for letters to reach comrades Thompson and Wiggins and for their answers and comments to appear in "Firearms, Old and New" in "Ask Adventure," so in the meantime we'll have some of the letters that came in before our new department was announced.

Hereafter all letters concerning firearms in any way should be sent, *not* to the magazine, but direct to either Mr. Wiggins or Mr. Thompson, according to whether it belongs in the field of one or the other. They'll be the doctors from now on.

Phoenix, British Columbia, Canada.

I have been reading with lively interest the article, "Firearms, Old and New," in the first August number by D. Wiggins and L. F. Brown. As I know all are welcome to the Camp-Fire, I can not here resist "butting-in." The article purports to be "a complete history of the principal types of firearms, etc.," and I read it with keen anticipation in the hope of learning why the only shooting instrument of precision built on truly scientific lines, namely the Whitworth "rifle," was never universally adopted.

Unfortunately I am not able to speak with authority concerning this superb weapon, and, writing from hearsay only, I am asking for publication because the matter is one of universal interest to most all of *Adventure* readers. Some of them, no doubt, reading this, will be able to give us the information needed

I HAVE the story from an old Indian army veteran, one who has seen strenuous service under both the British and American flags, who, being an enthusiastic soldier (albeit a Socialist), is necessarily a gun-crank. This, indeed, is his main hobby, and I understand he has amassed quite a collection of the better sort of firearms. This is what I can recall of his story to me concerning the Whitworth "rifle," and, as I have to depend on memory only for the details of a narrative told to me some years ago, I shall doubtless make some mistakes, which, I trust, some of our members will correct later on.

SOME time before the middle of the last century, the British Government offered a substantial prize, perhaps fifty thousand dollars, for the best type of rifled small arms. There were a number of competitors, among whom was Sir James (?) Whitworth, who submitted a type built on a totally different principle to that of all the others. The latter embodied the style in use today, namely, the round bore, choked or straight, channeled with the customary spiral grooves to produce the boring, twisting motion in the bullet. Whitworth's gun had no grooves, but, instead of having a round bore, was hexagonal in section, the bullet hexagonal also, and instead of the rifled grooves, the bore had a spiral twist inside—built on a mandrel, I think.

ALL the different types were tested at the Government butts, and the result showed that the Whitworth weapon was far superior to them all, inasmuch as with a given charge of explosive it had a greater velocity, flatter trajectory, greater range and heavier striking force. Moreover, the barrel was easier to clean, and that bane of all rifles was eliminated—it could not get "leaded," that is, the grooves, being non-existent, could not get choked with metal left by the projectile. Again, it is necessary in all the present rifles, I believe, to make the bullet larger than the bore in order that the bullet's sides may take hold of the rifling, thus expending an unnecessary amount of force, whereas, with the Whitworth, a close fit is all that is needed to prevent the escape of gases ahead of the missile. Theoretically better, and proved better practically by testing at various ranges! Yet the British Government failed to adopt it, and gave the preference to another weapon.

MY INFORMANT told me the reason for this was the same as the reason for the prevalence of inefficiency among British staff officers today even in this hour of urgent need—favoritism and "pull." Here I must digress a little: Caste saved the perpetrators of the Dardanelles shambles. Caste saved the murderer of the British wounded in the Mesopotamia campaign, and Caste did its best to damn those who exposed the abominable neglect. To hell with Caste and all its votaries!

But to return to our muttons. The few Whitworth weapons that were manufactured were speedily snapped up, and I suppose that the magnitude and multiplicity of his other interests prevented him from continuing their manufacture as a private venture. Very likely disappointment was a factor, but I have ever since wondered why he did not give the enterprise in charge to some one who had the leisure to develop it. Nowadays collectors are very willing to pay fancy prices for isolated specimens, for I am told that, even judged by modern standards, it is a good, accurate tool.

TO BROACH another subject I would like to say that I became acquainted about thirty years ago in this country (B. C.) with an old-time trapper and hunter, one who made his living that way and knew nothing else. He would have nothing whatever to do with the modern Winchester and Marlin of that date, and from his point of view he was right, I think. He used, I think, a bored-out, breech-loading rifle (don't remember the make; bolt action, I think) and used to mold all his own bullets, round ones, probably 50 caliber.

His argument was: "See here, there ain't no place in this country where you can do any long-range shooting; if you see anything to shoot it's always at point-blank range and through bushes.

"Now suppose a grizzly's comin' at you under them circumstances?

"You shoots at him with a 45-90 Winchester, and the bullet hits a twig and glances off and where *are* you? Better have a shotgun." Here he fondled his old smooth-bore. "Well, young feller, I takes this here weapon and shoots a round bullet at him, and it hits a twig, but it don't glance, and I gets him first shot."

It struck me as a pretty good argument, though I've never followed his advice. Anyway, while he knew nothing else, he *did* know his business.

I HAVE read your remarks on the German Bureau of Enemy Psychology, and my views are identical with yours. We Britishers have had it drilled into us from childhood about the decadent condition of the English-speaking race. German propaganda, of course.

It is a lie dangerous and insidious. In a sense it is absolutely true, yet relatively, in comparison with other races, the German, for instance, it is entirely and wholly false. The trouble with us British is—I don't know that this applies to Americans—that our faults loom so large in our own eyes that we overlook those of others and fail to compare our virtues with those of foreign nations.—W. H. BAMBURY.

Kansas City, Mo.

I have read the letter of Mr. S. H. Prockter of Vancouver, B. C., in the November issue of *Adventure* with considerable interest and, I must confess, a great deal of surprise. Mr. Prockter states that the Colt .45 automatic is so much lighter than the Webley .45 automatic that he can't shoot it with any satisfaction. This is odd, as the Colt .45 automatic weighs 39 ounces and the Webley 39½ ounces. He says that he could shoot the old Colt .45 revolver very well as it was heavy. I presume he means the Single Action Army, which, with 4¾-inch barrel, weighs only 37 ounces and with 7½-inch barrel weighs 41½ ounces. The .32 Webley automatic which he says weighs more than the Colt .45, weighs 20 ounces. The difference in the balance of the two makes of guns is probably what has misled him.

MR. PROCKTER asks advice as to an effective pocket arm. To my mind there is nothing answers this want as nearly as a Smith & Wesson .38 military with a 4 or 5 inch barrel, and I prefer the 1902 model with the round instead of the square butt. The round stock doesn't make as big a bulge in the clothes as the square one.

It is a little thinner than the Colt in every direction, which makes it come between the Colt Arms Special and the Colt Police Positive Special. It uses a very effective cartridge and, if the bullets aren't of a destructive enough nature as they come, if Mr. Prockter will take a small saw and saw them back from the point about half-way or a little more between the end of the bullet and the shell I think he'll be satisfied with their action. They will surely open anything up that they hit.

I NOTICE that one of my above statements is a little ambiguous. When I state the Smith & Wesson is thinner than the Colt, I refer to the Colt Arms Special. It isn't, of course, as thin or small as the Police Special, but the Police Special is a trifle light for most men, though I can use it very satisfactorily.

A soft bullet would without question be better for stopping purposes than a hard one. I have demonstrated this to my own complete satisfaction so many times on different kinds of game that there can be no doubt whatever.—LLOYD F. BROWN.

THE next is from a comrade in China. It was written before the end of the war but there are still chauffeurs "over there" and perhaps some of them will drop him a line. What he says about the old Chinaman is like the proverbial small boy with a pin and a worm who catches more fish than the fully-equipped sportsman. Here are we arguing over the fine shadings in the best weapons that modern skill and science can produce, and there are those Mongolians with crude but treasured heirlooms bringing down the birds. Oh, no, I know that doesn't mean they can shoot better than we can, but, well, it's sort of amusing. And if all of them hit everything they shot at, as did the old Chino, well, that's about all there is to hit, isn't it?

And it suggests something that has always interested me: How did Boone, Kenton, Crockett, Carson and the best shots of their day compare with the best shots of ours: (1) With allowance for the difference in weapons then and now, and (2) without allowance for that difference? Have Americans improved in marksmanship or deteriorated since the use of a gun is no longer a necessity throughout most of the land?

Tientsin, North China.

DEAR SIR:

Just a few words from a comrade who is out on the rim. I have just been reading an article in Camp-Fire and found it quite interesting.

LAST week I was out hunting snipe and met an old Chino with a gun that I think is worth while mentioning. The gun itself was, I should judge, between a six and an eight caliber shotgun, and looked like it might be older than China. It was quite long from the butt to the muzzle, about seven feet, and the barrel was at least five and a half feet of that. The stock was very short. I can not understand how the old man managed to shoot with it, because it did not seem to have any balance at all, but the old man seemed to make out all right with it. I stayed with him more than an hour during which time he scared up six snipe and he never missed one of them.

The gun was an old muzzle-loading flint-lock, and after every shot he would set it down before he went after his bird. He tamped in his powder and shot and he sure was an expert at that; I don't believe that it took him a minute to get through the whole process.

I had a Remington 12-bore automatic and thought that I was doing good shooting when I got two out of three birds, but the old Chinaman got them all. I asked him how he would trade, but he said that his gun had been in the family for two generations and that the ammunition for mine would cost too much, while he made his own.

I have been talking with some fellows who were up in Mongolia on a hunting trip last Fall, and they said that the native hunters and trappers up there all used those kinds of guns for big game.

Well, here's to all Camp-Fire friends.—E. S. GAGNIER, Quartermaster Corps, U. S. Army.

P. S. Would like to hear from some of the chauffeurs "Over There." Address: Ft. Wm. McKinley, P. I.

Visalia, California.

Not so many years ago makers and users of rifles insisted on weights from ten pounds to and above fifteen pounds, while today rifles of many times the power, and of equal safety, weigh below eight pounds. The same facts hold true in shotgun evolution.

THE reluctance of manufacturers to change patterns, true English conservativeness, and the demand of many customers for something like grandfather had probably explains the excessive weight of the arms M. Prockter refers to, and not the necessity for either safety or endurance. The very lightest modern pistol or revolver of standard make is amply safe for the ammunition for which it is designed and will endure the "grief" of continued hard usage equally as well as the excessively heavy foreign made weapons.

In my own case I know how difficult it was to become used to the "feel" of the modern muzzle-light (shotgun-like) rifle after years of use of the stocked-crowbar pattern with which I began, and for several years I weighted the barrel of my Smith & Wesson target-pistol to give it the "feel" of the muzzle-heavy revolvers I was accustomed to, while the balanced weight of the more modern automatic pistol is still awkward for me and tends to slow down my shooting of it.

REGARDING the use of jacketed or soft-point bullets or even the nicking of pure lead ones, I have made sufficient experiments to convince myself that Dr. Newton (I think) was correct when he said that no projectile with a less velocity than 1,200 feet per second would deform or mushroom unless it struck a very hard substance.

I tried 32-20 W. C. F. smokeless with jacketed hollow-point bullets in a six-inch barrel Colt and secured a penetration of six to eight inches of clear, soft dry wood without indication of deformation (and then sold the gun and went back to the .45).

CAL. .32 Colt Police Positive cartridges with two thin saw kerfs made at right angles to each other and extending from 1-3 to ½ the depth of the exposed (soft lead) bullet were fired through six and eight thicknesses of woolen cloth (old breeches) and through one inch of pine board and recovered in the cloth in the rear of the board without any sign of deformation or mushrooming except where they encountered a hard knot or nail.

Colt .45s sawed as above and fired with full 40-grain charges of black powder penetrated the same thickness of cloth, then five to six inches of dry redwood fence-post, then the same amount of cloth on the far side of the post and some were recovered in the soft ground beyond and none that were recovered were mushroomed in the least degree.

OF THE regular pistol or revolver cartridges marketed in this country I rate the stopping power in the following order: Colt .45: S. & W. Russian .44; Colt .41 with the 200 grain, blunt, outside lubricated bullet .38 150-grain flat-point bullet as made by the Ideal people, and I doubt if any sawing, nicking or boring will greatly increase their respective stopping capacity.—G. L. CHESTER.

Baltimore, Md.

Mr. Prockter's inquiry interested me very much. In the first place there are two kinds of hand-guns, one for target work, with long barrel, belonging to the holster class, and the other shorter, for pocket packing, and the long barrel weapon always has it over the shorter one.

THE pistol, however, is primarily intended for close work, and one of the finest pocket-guns of today, for easy packing, is the .38 Pocket Model Colt automatic. This gun is only 7½ inches long with 4½-inch barrel and weighs 32 ounces, and the man that can stand up against the blow of its bullet is a real man.

The finest gun made today, in my estimation, is the .38 Military Model Colt, which has a 6-inch barrel, weighs 38 ounces and is 9 inches over all. In Mr. Himmelwright's work, "Pistol and Revolver Shooting," this gun is shown to be the strongest in the world. Both of these .38 guns shoot an 130-grain ball, which in the latter model develops a velocity of 1,175 feet per second at 50 feet from the muzzle, strikes a blow of 398 pounds and has a penetration of 10 inches in soft white pine. The only other pistol that exceeds it in any way is the 7.63 M. M. Mauser which strikes a blow of 373 pounds, which is less than the Colt, but owing to the shape of the bullet, has a penetration of 11 inches of soft white pine.

AS FAR as any of the Colts being safe is concerned, there is not the slightest danger of them blowing up as Mr. Prockter seems to fear, and this is probably his reason for not being able to handle one of them as well as he did his old Webley—fearing it will blow up, he flinches and of course does not score. For his benefit, in the Government tests a .45 Colt was fired more than 5,000 times without a misfire, jam or single broken part. A wonderful record.

The Luger is also a fine gun and he should have made good with it.

As to nicking the ball to make it mushroom, there is not much in this, as a pistol ball does not, like a rifle ball, get up sufficient velocity to make it mushroom.

I WISH to add one thing, and that is that the hold of the automatic is different from that of the revolver. I had three revolvers and sold them all, as they had seen much service, intending to get new ones, but in looking around the automatic came to hand and I bought one. I could do nothing with it and turned it in and got a new revolver, but an acquaintance, who had worked at a Government arsenal, whom I told of my experience, told me I had made a mistake, so I bought another automatic, shot it as I had been directed and the automatic is the only gun for me. I have a .32 which I feel sure is a pretty good "stopper" if needed, and a .22 for target work—both Colts.

Mr. Walter Winans has just put out a work, or is just about to put out a work, on automatic pistol shooting, and I know it will be good, but at this time I can not give the name of it.

Just why the Webley people made their guns so heavy I have never been able to learn, except that possibly, when the designs were gotten out, it was considered necessary to have the gun as heavy as it is, but if this is the case, the idea was dropped long ago.—W. E. Mepham.

Detroit, Mich.

The English Webley-Scott automatic pistol .455 caliber weighs two pounds seven and a half ounces, with a five-inch barrel, eight shots. Taking the general perceptive view of it, it is not by any means a neat-appearing arm, awkward both as to looks and to handle; furthermore is not positive in action on account of the large number of working parts poorly made and constructed. The material, no doubt, is excellent, but the lines on which it is made are not coincident with its working qualifications.

The English can not as yet make side-arms, and their market is at all times flooded with a grand and various assortment of foreign-made guns, ranging from the cheap one-shilling Belgian guns and German derringers and Flobert system single shot b. b. cap-pistols to the British bull-dog pocket arms. Clumsy, inaccurate, non-reliable and not fair to gaze upon, and all are overburdened with lots of scrap iron, steel, etc. The countries across the creek can not, it seems, conceive the idea of turning out a good reliable arm that is as consistent with looks as it is to weight.

One reason is the lack of interest shown in pistol and revolver shooting—the British army and navy and other branches of the service were not, at the time I have in mind, equipped with a side-arm, but I know personally of three that were, and this only in the case of certain non-coms and officers, and, at the last practise I saw at Birbright Camp, an American, who was an officer, with a Colt revolver, certainly did some shooting, both mounted and on foot. The others were using a Webley-Scott .455, 4½ barrel, weight 2 pounds 3 ounces, heavy, clumsy to handle, accompanied with a kick like a Texas jack and extremely inaccurate even at short distance. Their later W. S. model is constructed on better lines, weighing with a 7½-inch barrel, same caliber, 2 pounds 7 ounces.

The art of making side-arms by our good English cousins and allies has not gotten to the fine point where they can turn out a real fine pistol or revolver. If they have, I have not seen any up to the present time, and I am open for criticism. They all set too high in the hand, painful sprains, etc., resulting from heavy recoil and poor balance.

The trigger pull is way up in the pounds, ranging anywhere from four to eight, and in the case of European arms this, in almost every instance, is more.

AND, to answer the other portion of the question of Mr. Prockter, would say that from his letter I think he is a little gun-shy with a side-arm. Note he says "I find myself expecting it to blow to pieces." All the Colts and W. & S. guns are tested with overloads at their respective factories, and if one takes good care of his arm there is nothing much to fear, provided, however, one uses factory loaded ammunition that is suited for that particular arm, or reloaded ammunition by one who knows how.

He says that the Colt Company made their good name by the older "killer .45." Yes, that's where they got their start, and they have been climbing steadily ever since old Sam Colt first made and put on the market his revolver over three-quarters of a century ago, and to my idea they are the gun for a man who knows. This is only for side-arms. The Colt .45 auto stood the most severe test that was ever given any arm that was to be issued to any service in the world—some record. When the United States saw the value of automatics as side-arms for our boys, she called a board that passed judgment on the Savage and Colt .45s, and, as we know, the latter broke all records. And we had the choice of numerous foreign-made arms.

THE shooting of six-guns by our best shots and even when done by ordinary persons has always excited the interest and comments of our English cousins, whether this be at tin cans or regulation targets. We have this art down fine; there is no question about it, and I think, in fact I know, that if Mr. Prockter will stick by the Colt auto .45 he will find it the gun that is a gun.

The Savage I do not like; it does not function normally. It sticks, jams, etc., and it is not the fault of the ammunition. One thing, though, with any automatic, there is a tendency to jam, and the only cause that I know of is stale ammunition. Smokeless powder, we are told, deteriorates with age, length of time unknown to me at present, and, again, the grains of powder vary when seen under a strong glass, and if left in belt or carried in one position the larger grains shift to the surface, naturally causing the explosion when the primer is struck to take longer time, thereby losing power whereby, although the bullet is forced out, the recoil is not strong enough to eject the empty and reload. Hence, a jam.

So bear in mind—fresh ammunition for the automatics, or an occasional shaking up or around; keep them clean and there won't be any kick coming. For cleaning, a small, flat, enamel paint-brush, three-in-one oil, is recommended, and attention must be given to the right-angles of the grooving of the slide and receiver.

Here is a table of ballistics for W. & S. revolvers:

TABLE OF BALLISTICS FOR W. & S. REVOLVERS

W. & S. .455 Auto Revolver

7 grains of cordite, diam. of bullet .455, weight 220 grains, R. N. (round nose), muzzle velocity at 50 ft. 750, energy 280.6 ft. lbs. Penetration in pine 4¼ inches.

W. & S. W. S. Model

5.5 grains of cordite, diam. of bullet .455, velocity 265, R. N., 700 ft. at 50 ft. 288 ft. lbs. 4¼ in. in pine. This with a 7½-inch barrel.—C. RYAN.

P. S. A tip that might be used in regard to an automatic. When I come home I let my retractor spring out to full length and let the hammer down all the way instead of keeping both tense for months at a stretch. The spring is a main part, so baby it along. I find in carrying the gun that a shoulder holster is O. K. for carrying around, tied down by a whang string to the belt to prevent coming up when gun is lifted; or a good, well-made belt holster is O. K. Both of mine are hand-made and are "fitted" to the gun. There is no binding of leather around the trigger guard, and further, they are cut away to facilitate a guide draw by cutting the leather to permit my trigger-finger engaging directly with the trigger.

If Mr. Prockter so wishes I would be pleased to furnish him with a pattern that has been tried and tested by myself and proven its worth.—C. R.

A COMRADE, now a minister, joins our other comrades who have come forward with their own experiences in breaking away from the "booze habit" on the chance that such experiences may be of practical help to others who also want to break away. No, Camp-Fire is conducting no prohibition campaign. Our Camp-Fire considers that a matter for every man to decide for himself. But if a comrade has decided against drink and wants to get away from it, that is a different thing. If we can help him, we ought to and we're glad to. Hear this comrade:

AT ONE time I was rather successful as a newspaper man. I held a position as financial editor of a certain division of a certain newspaper syndicate. Because of my work I had to be a good fellow—or because I was a good fellow I was successful in my work. But, because of my youth and laws of nature that what we sow must be reaped in a greater quantity, my health broke. Insomnia. Weight 110 pounds. Walking early one morning when it was oppressively hot, the notion struck me to walk till I was tired. I did.

I left the city behind me about two miles, and became gloriously sleepy about 4 A.M. at a crossing of the road I was on and the railroad. As I was wearing "palm beach" which could be laundered I lay me down under an adjacent water-tank.

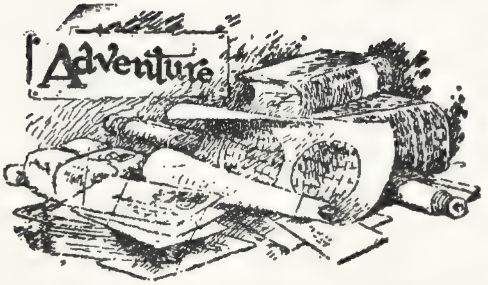
The next thing I knew some grizzled human shook me into wakefulness and said: "Come on, bo, here we are."

The humor of the thing struck me and I went—on to the side door pullman. I expected to telegraph back that I was taking a vacation, but the thirst hit me the first day, and I decided to stick it out with some two bucks in my pocket.

WE WENT into dry territory. I had to work or starve. I let my beard grow so none would recognize me. I left the railroad and struck right across country. The railroad was dangerous for me—communication was too easy. Money gone, I got work. Harvest hands were very scarce. I offered to work for my room and board. I pulled broom-corn the first day of work and fainted from trying to keep up with a ten-year-old girl. At the end of two weeks I could nearly do a day's work.

One of my arms was covered with scabbing sores. It puzzled me and hindered my work, as one as long as my hand was right over my elbow. I had never had any blood disease, and wondered what it could be. An "old-timer" asked me if I used to drink. I told him a little. He snorted. Then he confided that it was the booze coming out. Rather peculiar diagnosis, but the only probable one I could think of. I never asked a physician.

In six weeks the scabs were gone. In a year the scars. Two months after "embarking" I could do a man's work. Six months after, I returned, weight 165. A punch in either fist. Browned so my sometime boss didn't know me. Turned down my old job at $200 a month because of the temptation. Took work at $85 a month. Got married. That was six years ago. I have not yet reached my old salary but I will pass it in two years. In ten I will double it. If I had stayed I would have been dead by now or mooching enough to buy a drink and living on my past glory. Selah.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For 25 cents we will send you, *postpaid,* the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. 25 cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: for $5.00, one copy of January, 1912, issue, containing "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure."—M. M. McMurray, 27 Dupont St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

WILL BUY: for 20 cents each, one copy of each of the following: Dec. 1910; Jan., April, May, 1911; April 1912; August, 1913; Jan., Feb., April, May, Aug., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1914.—A. E. Greenwood, 111 N. Troy Avenue, Atlantic City, N. J.

WILL BUY: Jan., 1913; Jan., 1916.; Aug., 1916.; First Aug., 1918; First Oct., 1918, 25 cents each.—S. B. H. Hurst, Box 892, Seattle, Wash.

WILL SELL: Complete file from Vol. 1, No. 1, to date. All in first-class condition. 10 cents the copy and express charges. Will not break the set.—Harold M. Haskell, 79 Ray St., Manchester, N. H.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address Wayne Eberly, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's,* Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts

Captain A. E. Dingle, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1

B. W. Brintnall, 5527 33d Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2

Captain A. E. Dingle, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1

Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2

Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3

Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1

Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2

John B. Thompson, 4249A Juniata St., St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 3

E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 4 and Mexico Part 1

J. W. Robertson, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border States of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1

(Editor to be appointed.) Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in coin NOT stamps)*

Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S.; its possessions, or Canada.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer. Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations, No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
George L. Catton, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
Ed. L. Carson, Clear Lake, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
Edgar Young, 84 Court St., Brooklyn, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. Asia, Southern
Gordon McCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports: hunting, trading, traveling.

19. Japan and Korea
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios. (Mr. Ritchie, the former editor of this section, is now in France. His section is accordingly in abeyance until we can find a suitable successor.)

20. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Captain A. M. Lochwitzky (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

24. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

25. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

26. Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, OLD AND NEW

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Firearms of Foreign Make (including comparsions between foreign and American makes.)—J. B. Thompson, 4249A Juniata St., St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Firearms of American Make. D. Wiggins, Salem, Ore.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

The Great Slave Lake Country

MANY a man has made good at trapping in the Canadian Northwest. And furs bring more today than ever before. Think it over, if you care for that sort of life. But first read Mr. Carson's words to a comparative tenderfoot; then write one of our experts for advice:

Question:—"I would like to have you give me some information, which you think would be of use to a couple of young men who are thinking of taking a hunting and trapping trip in the near future. What do you think of the country around the vicinity of the Great Slave Lake for game and fur animals?

What would be the necessary equipment to take along for a stay of at least seven months? Do you think two hundred dollars apiece would be enough for a start?

We both have done a little trapping before, but not on a large scale. Do you think a man could go out and at least break even? What sort of rifle would you recommend for such a trip?

I would also like to know if there are very many who make a living by such work. And what are the best means of transportation? When do you think would be the proper time to start?

I also wish you would give me some of the regulations that govern that part of the country. Where could I get a good map of it?"—J. S., Empire, C. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The Great Slave country is decidedly good for fur and game, as is all that section. Of course this does not mean that a man can string out a line of traps anywhere and get good results, but that there are plenty of fur-bearing animals in that section which the man with experience and energy can secure.

If you can get on the ground with two hundred dollars apiece, it should be enough for a start in a modest way. Get there not later than the middle of October; earlier if you can. Your best means of transportation will be by canoe, so it will be advisable to get a start that will land you at your destination before the freeze-up.

A .38-caliber Winchester with a .38 long-barreled Colt in your belt is to my notion the ideal gun outfit. The same ammunition does for both, and at short range, with accurate shooting, both are equally effective. Then again, there is no difficulty in replenishing your stock in the event of running short of shells.

The Department of Interior, Ottawa, Canada, will furnish you with a good map and other data on application.

Get your outfit at Edmonton or Peace River. Get it as close to your trapping-ground as possible. Tell your storekeeper what your plans are and he will give you what you need. When he does so, see if you can not get on with half of it. Take nothing but essentials, and few of those.

Mexican Opals

WHEN Mr. Whiteaker joined the Army, his sister held down his editorship until we could find some one to relieve her. This is one of the many helpful and informative letters with which she has favored inquirers:

Question:—"As per the directions given in *Adventure* I write to you for the following information: Give me any information you may have in regard to opals and opal mining in Querétaro, Mexico—when the mines were opened, the extent of the output, the character of the mines, by whom the mines are owned, how the opals are sold and anything else you may be able to give me along the lines I suggest."—ZED E. BEE, Princeton, W. Va.

Answer, by Miss Whiteaker:—Your letter of inquiry about opals and opal mining of Querétaro received some time ago and will now tell you what I know on the subject.

The opal was accidentally discovered in Mexico ten leagues northeast of San Juan del Rio by an agricultural laborer in 1835. The first mine was called the Esperanza (Hope) and it was not systematically worked until about 1870.

Opal mines are usually very deep. The matrix is drilled out with steel drills (*barrenos*), brought to the surface in sacks swung across the backs of *peon* laborers, broken into small pieces with hammers and sent to the lapidaries, who polish the stones on grindstones of varying degrees of fineness. When an unusually rich vein is found and opened near the surface, it presents a most beautiful spectacle, the rock glistening with many different rays of colored light. The first stratum, usually about five feet thick, is generally followed by a layer of earth of about the same thickness, and this in turn is succeeded by another bed of opal-bearing rock. This sometimes continues to a great depth. The matrix is so hard that dynamite is used to dislodge it and many fine stones are ruined in the blasting process. The Querétaro district is so rich in opaliferous deposits that traces of the mineral can be seen in the stone used for building purposes.

The fire-opal (*girasol de fuego*) the finest opal of commerce, is usually taken from a grayish-red matrix; it is often called the "precious opal" from the variety and beauty of its coloring. "It is without a peer; an exquisitely beautiful stone displaying emerald tints upon a basic color of fiery red, and often flashing a fine flame from a rich crimson center." The best specimens are the most resplendent of all the different kinds of opals, and being almost as hard as the finest Hungarian stones, they are valuable and rare.

One of the finest mines in Mexico of these uniquely beautiful stones, is worked by the Sonora News Company. The Harlequin opals, the beautiful cloudy (or milk) opal and cat's-eye opal are also here. Do not know the output. Mexico City is the best market for fine opals and most of the good stones are taken there.

Deer-Hunting in Wisconsin

SOME of you deer-hunters looking for new territory might try Wisconsin. We heartily join Mr. Pinkerton in wishing the inquirer luck:

Question:—"(1) Where can I purchase a Porier packsack? (2) What, in your opinion, is the best American rifle for use on Wisconsin deer? (3) With what sights would you fit it?"—CAMPBELL WATSON.

Answer, by Mr. Pinkerton:—1.—I haven't Poirier's address, but it is on Superior Street, Duluth, Minn. He is the man who first made the packsack and he will send you a catalog. Get the best grade. The name is the Poirier Tent and Awning Company, if I remember correctly, but that will reach him as he is well known in Duluth.

2.—Captain C. L. Gilman, who handled this department until he entered the Army, would have written you a book on guns and sight. He is one of the best authorities in the country, but, though I have done far more hunting in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Canada, I never could get interested in guns. I always thought that the shooting had more to do with it. My first deer-hunting in Wisconsin was with a thirty-thirty Marlin. I think the later guns are better, however. You want a light gun with low trajectory and good striking power. For the last seven years I have used a Mannlicher, old German army rifle, 8 mm. One Summer in Canada I got four deer with four shells and not one of them moved a step after I pulled the trigger. It acted the same way on moose.

Deer shooting is quick, snap work, and a light gun, short to handle in the brush, is better. A thirty-two special Winchester is a very popular gun in northern Minnesota. The Savage rifles are all good, though I wouldn't pose as an authority on the new 25 affair. Seems like too much range for deer.

3.—Sights as above. I don't know because I never interested myself. Always used open sights, and, with deer, I can't remember that I used them. It's a glimpse and pull the trigger with deer, and it seems to me an open sight is better.

Good luck in Wisconsin. That's my state, but it's thirteen years since I have hunted in it.

Work for Railroad Men in Central America

HAVE your eyes ever turned toward Latin America, and have you ever wondered just what opportunities that wealthy, vast country had to offer you? Mr. Young advises a railroad man in his answer to the following letter:

Question:—"Will you please give me some information about Honduras, C. A. I am thinking seriously of going there if conditions are anything like what I have so far learned in a limited way.

"Are there any railroads there and do they employ Americans in any capacity? If so, what? What other employment would be open to an American of good education, a hard worker, good address and disposition, who would like to get in some business for himself, after being there for a while.

"I speak, read and write Spanish, and am not afraid of work. Is an American welcome there and are there many of them? Can you give me the address of one or two individuals or firms there, or who have headquarters in the United States and business interests in Honduras?

"Particularly should I like to know about the railroads, as that is my occupation. What would be the way to go to get there and about what would it cost for transportation?

"What is the best part of the country? What are the general characteristics and customs of the people? What are the principal productions and general business possibilities for a small capital, say $1,800 to $2,500? What game have they and what are local conditions generally?"—C. W. Ingles, Lewis Springs, Arizona.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The United Fruit Co. own most of the railroads in Central America. They employ Americans as conductors and engineers. Their address is 17 Battery Place, New York, N. Y. You can also get the addresses of the resident officials from an official Railway Guide, which your ticket agent will allow you to consult. Also write Mr. Thos. O'Connell, Gerente General, F. C. N. del P. de N., Managua, Nicaragua.

There are many Americans scattered over Central America. They are welcomed by the better class of natives.

The New York and Honduras Rosario Gold Mining Co., New York, N. Y., own the largest gold mine in Honduras and employ several hundred Americans. It is located at San Juancito.

The best way to get there from where you are is via the Pacific Mail from San Francisco to Ampala, and by auto to Tegucigalpa. Write the Pacific Mail for current prices and sailing dates.

Please write the Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., and the Pan-American Union of the same city for fuller information than I can supply by letter. This will be sent to you upon request.

The best plan, if you intend to buy land and settle down there, is to go down, work a while, and then follow your own good judgment. I should say the capital you mention is sufficient to buy quite a large tract of land.

I am a railroad man also (telegraph operator and auditor), and found the railroads in Central America all O. K. to work for.

Northeastern Australia

A BIT of information about the land so many believe to be on the verge of a great boom. Far away, but alluring:

Question:—"I am a constant reader of *Adventure* and I see you have charge of the Australian section in "Ask Adventure." I guess it seems funny for me to make this inquiry, as I am a New Zealander, but have only been over here three years. I want to get information about Northern Queensland and the Northern Territory. I am a ship carpenter and boat builder by trade, and am also an experienced boatman.

"Now, I want to settle in a semi-tropical climate, somewhere on the coast, where I can do a little boat building and a little fishing, and have a few acres of land—enough to grow stuff for myself. I want a climate that is warm enough to grow bananas and all tropical fruits."—Hubert Levey, Eureka, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—There are three towns on the Queensland coast either of which might suit your purpose—Cairns, Townsville and Mackay. The climate is tropical and healthy, and, with the immense growth of the sugar industry and the prospect of the Northern Territory being developed, now that the transcontinental railroad is an accomplished fact, these seaports are certain to grow in importance and to progress very rapidly in commerce.

I therefore think that you would be wise to write to the Government Tourist Bureau in Brisbane, submitting all the questions you desire to have answered, and I have no doubt that, of the towns named, there will be at least one which will give you the opportunities you require.

Alaskan Timber Opportunities

YOUNG men are needed in Alaska, if they are the right sort. Lumbering is one of the coming industries in that land of immense resources. Here are a few valuable pointers about breaking into the game:

Question:—"Wishing to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the *Adventure*, I am writing to ask about a lumbering enterprise in Alaska.

"I am taking a course in civil engineering and in a few years will be graduated. How long would it take an energetic young man of the above description to work up to woods boss in a good-sized lumber company (in Alaska or the States).

"After learning the business, could a man with small capital start in the business of manufacturing lumber in Alaska? What amount of capital would be absolutely necessary to have to start a small mill with your own woods crew?

"How about the transportation of the logs from the woods to the mill? Could you use the Government Railway, or would you have to build your own railway; or could mule-teams be used?

"Is the Government giving the timber land, or do you have to pay for it. If so, what is the price? Could you just get timber grants from the Government without the land attached?"—J. H. Baumann, Greenville, S. C.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—There is nothing but local lumbering in Alaska, in the immediate vicinity of the towns, and it is a very precarious business because the towns are small and subject to sudden slumps. Nothing could be more uncertain today than this industry.

But the future is different. There are immense tracts of fair lumber in Alaska—largely spruce and fir—and this is going to be valuable some time. I dare say a well-educated young man who wants to use his HANDS as well as his head would have little trouble in getting a good job in some local mill, as well as a good job in the mining sections (the former is usually near the latter, too).

But as for engaging in an independent business, this will rather be a matter of watching your opportunities some little time after you have been there and have studied developments. Southern and Southeastern Alaska are the most likely regions. The Yukon basin will continue a purely local market for many years. Alaska is looking for such young fellows as you, especially if you are husky and mean business for a term of years. It's a fine country to grow up in after you are twenty or thereabouts. What you need is an indomitable character, first of all, and any brains and education along engineering lines you possess is easily carried around and decidedly no handicap.

Most of the timber is "tied up," as people say, in forest reserves, but, as you probably know, that is merely Uncle Sam's way of preventing waste and monopoly. The forests are free to be milled for all proper industrial purposes and on liberal terms.

Since Alaska is one-fifth the size of the United States, I can not advise you about places and conditions in any specific way, under the general terms of your letter. The laws applying to Alaska are almost identical with those obtaining in the United States, not only as to timber, but as to mining, agriculture and the rest. Bear that in mind and with maps and pamphlets from the Geological Survey and other departments at Washington, which will be sent you freely, you can easily study out better answers to your questions than I could give you.

The Bahamas

RIGHT off our own coast lies a group of islands which seem to have been developed very little. Perhaps there's a good chance for some one who knows the lumbering game:

Question:—"Would like some information about the Bahama Islands. To what extent are the islands settled by whites? Is there any land open for homestead, and wouldn't it be worth taking up? What island would you recommend?

Would also like information about commercial fishing on east coast of Florida. Could a man make wages if he has experience with fishing?"—Wm. Swanson, Chicago, Illinois.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—Regarding the Bahamas, I believe none of these islands are suitable for homesteading. The only one possible, Andros, might be made to pay in the timber line, since it is covered with forests of valuable hardwoods. As for settlements, New Providence is the only island settled to any extent, and all the population there is in Nassau. Some of the other small islands have a few people, and on the northwest side of Andros there is also a small community.

If you will write to the Trade Development Board, Nassau, Bahamas, they will send you full particulars regarding taking up land, and give you information regarding the resources of the place. Of course you understand these islands are British?

Fishing on Florida's East coast is very good in Winter, and many northern fishermen spend the cold months down there, near Eden, Tampa, Miami, etc., and make a good stake.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, ***give your own name if possible.*** All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

JOHNSON, J. H. Canadian by birth. A letter of great importance from Brisbane, Australia, awaits you at the San Francisco General Post-Office.—Leah Johnson.

HART, JACK. Left Chuquicarneta, Chile, in 1913. Went to South Africa in Norwegian bark *Cissy*. Any information will be appreciated.—Address C. M. Anderson, 611 Howard St., San Francisco, Calif.

SHAW, SYLVESTER ELMER. Age about 35 years, blond hair, and blue eyes. Sunny disposition. Last heard of working for the C. G. W. Ry., in Iowa. About 1910 at town of Moorland; is believed to have been married there. **Please write to—Birdie and Bill care *Adventure.***

BLESH, RUDOLF P. (Artist) Whom I knew in Oklahoma City, please write.—Address David F. Ash, Colton House, Mount Vernon, Iowa.

McMAHON, MICHAEL. 14 or 15 years ago ran a livery stable at Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address James Finan, Nanty Glo Post-Office, Cambria County, Pa.

MONROE, C. Late of Tennessee (Ashfald). Write to friends who earnestly wish to hear from you. A letter for you at Mrs. Monks. Would like you to join us as was intended. Address your old friend Doc. A. Glade, care of H. Brodson, 18 Darley R'd, Manly, Sydney, Australia.

PARKER, CHARLES A. About 5 feet 6 inches tall, light hair and blue eyes, has a small scar to the side of eye. Several gold teeth. Slender build, weighs about 136 pounds. Is 35 years of age. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated and rewarded by his wife.—Address Mrs. Molly Parker, 259 Coatsville Ave., Salt Lake City, Utah.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

COLOR-SERGEANT THOMAS NICHOLSON, whom I knew in Panama; also other friends please write.—Address David F. Ash, Colton House, Mount Vernon, Iowa.

KING, WILLIAM; BENEDELL, HENRY; of Cape Town. Please forward address to a friend who sailed with you from Durban, Natal, to Portland, Oregon, on the *Arnoldus-Vinnen*, in 1914. Have a few explanations to make.—Address Charles O'Conner, 522,806 Gunner, 36th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery, C. E. F. care of Army P. O., London, England.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

DOMINICK, MAC. Communicate with your partner H. B. Madder of Newark.—Address care of Mrs. W. B. Madder, 185 Jelliff Ave., Newark, N. J.

BROWN, CLAYTON. Born at Fleetwood, Ontario, about 24 years ago. Came west to Hartney, Manitoba, on the harvest excursions in the Fall of 1911, and worked for Joel Briggs at Hartney. Last heard from two years ago in Montana. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated.—Address Edward W. Shea, Box 52, Pentieton, B. C.

BUSH, JACK; CONRAD, RED WELCH, ACIE STAMPER, WILENSKY or any of the "El Valle" crowd, write your old friend "Army" care of *Adventure.*

HAYNES, EDDIE; BAKER, LEE. Benson man-of-war's man with whom I was intimate with in San Mateo, Cal. Write your old friend. Also Gloma Larry, who wrote to me, and my letter in reply was returned. All old friends write.—Address T. Harry Brodson, 50 Whistler St., Manly, Sydney, Australia.

ANDERSON, ANDY. Write once in a while to the bunch; everybody thinks you croaked. So if this blows your way don't forget.—Address Wagoner Bob Rich, care of *Adventure.*

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First-April or Mid April issues of Adventure. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

AYLES, LEON W. and Tessie; Beasley, Tom H.; Clancy, R. L.; Decker, Edward L.; Dewal, Jack E. Jr.; Elliot, Robert; Fribert, Fread; Hannold, Henry F.; Hendricks, E. Sylvester; Johnstone, Andres Rintoul; Kirk, Howard; Kline, Serg't Onie F.; Kohn, Pvt. Wm.; Ledingham or Ward, John; Lucas, Jo.; Lucas, Mrs. Jo.; Luntze, Alfred; Lyon, Henry; McGovern, John; Michael, James; Rahal, Joe; Relatives, Robinson, William; Van Dorn, Earl; Wallinger, E. A.; Walters, W. E.; Wilson, Christopher, Terry.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Lee Hayes; G. B. Bennett; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; O. B. Franklin; Cole Williams; L. Fitzsimmons. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you—Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID - MAY ADVENTURE

Other than the three mentioned in the ad. on the second page, seven stories of adventure in all corners of the earth will come to you in the Mid-May issue, out April 18.

ON THE TRAIL OF TIPPOO TIB Part II. — *By Talbot Mundy*
Wherein *Yerkes* and his ivory-hunters get into German East and trouble.

THE HOUSE ON THE DUNE — *J. Allan Dunn*
On a lonely spot by the Pacific the house was built.

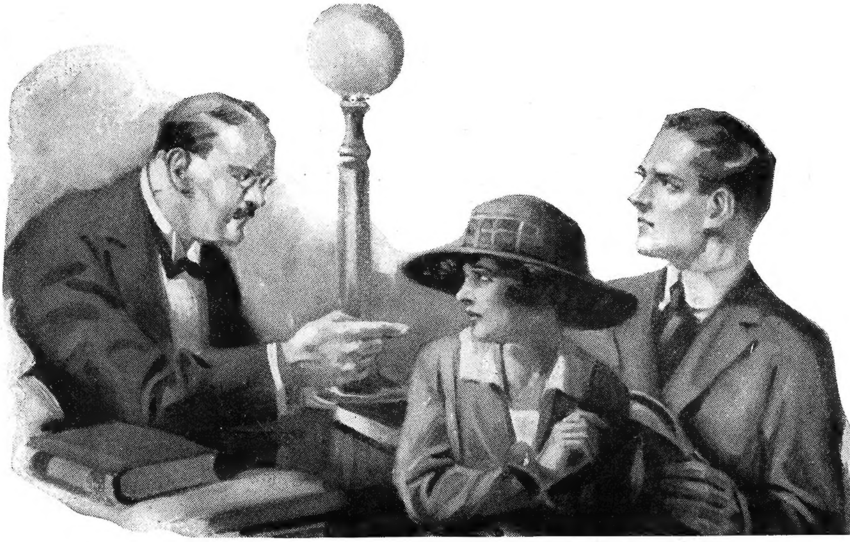
A CAROUSAL IN COAL — *By Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.*
Which concerns a cool Dutch skipper and a very fiery South American Government.

AN ECHO FROM THE DESERT — *By Leon H. Wilson*
A search for gold may lead men through many dark places.

TO A FINISH — *By Louis Dodge*
On the shore of the little island not far from Manila the fight was begun—but it wasn't ended there.

THE AFFAIRS OF MEN — *By William David Ball*
Wantonly cruel was *Bartholomew Webb*, but he managed to hide it—almost always. A story of the desert.

-70 BELOW — *By Ben F. Baker*
Very cold it gets up in Alaska, so cold as to be a real test of courage.



"You Lie!"

HERE in this one-horse town—at night—they stood before the judge—arrested—she an heiress, promised to a big politician—he, the man beside her, not her fiance——

Why did they lie? Why did they hide their true names? Find out the amazing sentence the judge pronounced upon them. The startling outcome of it all makes a big story.

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Richard Harding DAVIS

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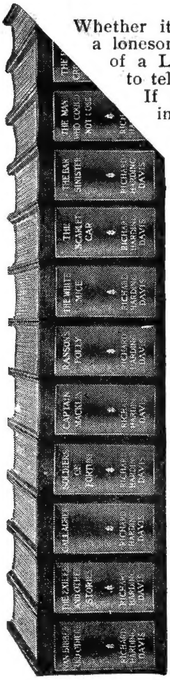

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If you are one of those who know that somewhere in the world, splendid adventures are always happening; that a beautiful woman can be interesting; that today—at this moment—brave men are laughing at fear—tricking death—defying fate and winning the women they love—Richard Harding Davis is for you.

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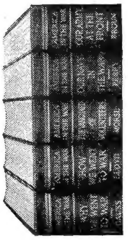
HOW WE WENT TO WAR, by Nelson Lloyd
THE VANGUARD OF AMERICAN VOLUNTEERS, by Edwin W. Morse
OUR ARMY AT THE FRONT, by Heywood Broun
OUR NAVY IN THE WAR, by Lawrence Perry



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